Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

Chapter 4

Identity Politics and New Historical Resources: Dalit Location in 1857 History

> Those who have control over democracy also have control over history.
>
> Dalit writer, S. Rao Sanjeevan Nath

The BSP has always been on the look out for new historical resources that can be added to its repertoire for creating a more influential language to expand its mass base and mobilize more and more communities. These new resources are then transformed into identity resources and disseminated to the people through various mediums, as discussed earlier. However in the process of dissemination, only certain types of heroes emerge as identity markers. These heroes form the master base of the BSP's resources out of which it selects those it considers appropriate for its political mobilization. As mentioned earlier, the 1857 Rebellion is the richest historical resource for the BSP. The heroes of this movement, as projected by the Dalits, are Balluram Mehtar, Udaiya Pasi, Chetram Jatav, Banke Chamar, Ganga Baksh, Beera Pasi, Makka Pasi, Matadin Bhangi. The women heroes of this movement are, among others, Jhalkaribai, Udadevi, Avantibai, Pannadhai and Mahaviridevi (Vidrohi 2004). These heroes form the master base of the BSP. It is noteworthy that the BSP did not find the heroes from other phases in the Indian freedom movement, like Madari Pasi who led the *Kisan Andolan* (Farmer's Rebellion) that took place in UP in 1914 (R.P. Saroj 1997: 27), or the Dalit matyrs of the Chauri Chaura incident (Vidrohi 2004: 176), significant enough to be developed as icons. The heroes picked up by BSP were initially used to mobilize the specific caste groups to which they belonged but gradually they were transformed into icons for the entire Dalit community. For example, when Jhalkaribai was being used for mobilizing

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

the 'Kori' caste to which she belonged she was referred to as Jhalkaribai Kori. But later when her myth was being used to build up the image of Mayawati, she came to be known only as Jhalkaribai. Similarly, the caste names of Udadevi 'Pasi', Mahaviridevi 'Bhangi', Avantibai 'Lodhi' and Pannadhai 'Dhanuk' were dropped while linking their stories with Mayawati's. This, however, does not imply that the caste identity of Dalits was being homogenized into one Dalit identity. Rather, while a broader Dalit identity was being forged through electoral mobilization by the BSP under one political umbrella, their caste identity was also simultaneously being strengthened through the stories of their caste heroes.

The political strategy of the BSP is to tell and retell the stories of the heroes, build memorials and to repeatedly organize celebrations around their stories so that they may be etched into the collective psyche of the people. The stories are narrated in a manner that would ensure that the Dalits are able to imagine the story of the making of this nation in which they claim to have played a significant role. Several books like *Swatantrata Sangram Mein Achhuton Ka Yogdan* (Dinkar 1990), *Jhoothi Azadi* (Madan 1987), *Pasi Samaj Ka Swatantrata Sangram Mein Yogdan* (Pasi 1998), *Dalit Dastavej* (Vidrohi 2004) and so on, document the contributions of various Dalit heroes in different phases of India's freedom struggle. The significance of the sacrifices made by their ancestors are reasserted by saying that despite their sacrifices, the desires, dreams and aspirations for the nation-state are yet to be fulfilled. These narratives help them to claim a respectable place in the contemporary process of nation building and a lion's share in State-sponsored development projects and other democratic benefits. By repeatedly narrating their role in the nation making process, the marginalized communities put forward a moral logic in favour of reservations and social justice for themselves. They contend that despite the blood and sweat that they had shed for the building of this nation and their historical role in its development, the State has not helped them to recover from their social, cultural and economic losses. Through these narratives they assert that their role in the recorded history of nation making has not been sufficiently acknowledged and their contribution in the freedom struggle has been completely ignored (Dinkar 1990: 23). The narratives of the 1857 Rebellion helped them not only to establish their own heroes, but also to dethrone the existing higher-caste heroes from the mainstream narratives. In their narratives, they presented the high castes as traitors, conspirators and communities which were dishonest to their motherland. The Dalits also attempted to prove that by capturing history, these traitors now appear as most nationalist.

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

They have become the most influential sections after independence (Vidrohi 2004: 86). The Dalits thus feel that there are sufficient grounds to explore *their* contribution to the freedom struggle and gain compensation for it in the present.

Over the last few decades, affirmative action by the State has produced some powerful leaders from the Dalit and low caste communities at many different levels of public–political life in the country. This has directly impacted on the politics of historiography in India, leading to the deconstruction of the legitimacy of history and its dominant methodologies. The effect of this has been the democratization of history as knowledge of the communities, which ultimately leads to the larger goal of democratization of history as a discipline. Dipesh Chakrabarty (2003), in his paradigm shifting article on the changing methodologies and epistemology of history, mentions that history as a formal discipline was introduced to the Indians during the British rule. At that time, historical evidence and ideas of truth and reality were central to the discipline. In the post-colonial period too, history as a discipline has remained anchored in this idea of evidence. But with developments in Indian democracy and the changing political arena in which Dalits and subalterns have become the principal actors, the distinction between a myth and a verifiable fact is becoming blurred. The modes of reasoning taught in the courses on social theory in universities are not necessarily obvious to citizens from the subaltern classes who now actively shape the character of Indian democracy. Chakrabarty identifies that there is an obvious paradigm shift in which the history as proposed by subalterns and Dalits, which is grossly different from professional academic history, is actively and consciously redefining the boundaries of history as knowledge.

In the changing socio-political milieu of Indian democracy, projects of inventing and reinventing the past are being undertaken by many marginalized communities to support their demand for an appropriate share in the power structure of state and society. The social and historical meaning of the past is being recreated and in this process, the past becomes the subject of present reflection and reconstruction to change one's marginalized social position. Here, the past is not merely a bygone past. It is, instead, built into the present. In this condition, the past not only appears as the professional historian's past, which is claimed to be 'rational history' based on empirical and positiv-istic notions of the past (Davies 2003: 5). It also appears as the past that helps the Dalits in their ongoing struggle for carving their future against the oppressive present. This past is the living history of these communities, which they may have experienced

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

in reality or cognitively, and helps them to forge connectivity with their own selves (Hoy 1985). The structures of power that condition the knowledge and the writing of history are deconstructed in a way that presents a critique to the nation-state through Dalit narratives of nationalism, and puts forward their identities and differences for an appropriate share in power and in development. New histories are also being generated as knowledge base and resources for their democratic struggle for a better quality of life. This reflects a criticism raised by the communities who have not been fully co-opted in history and power, and in the democratic processes and development schemes run by the Indian nation-state. Foucault observed a similar process in the relationship between co-option, social resistance and social development (Foucault 1974: 367). This phenomenon is widely observed in UP, Bihar and Maharashtra and is a recently growing tendency in Madhya Pradesh, Delhi and Haryana. It may also be prevailing in other Indian states where Dalit empowerment is on the agenda.

In this agenda the past has been an integral and constitutive element of identity assertion and also a medium for coping with the oppressive present. There has also been a strong urge and need to link these narratives about the past with the story of the making of the nation for Dalits in the contemporary socio-political context. These narratives describing the role of the lower castes in the making of the modern nation are being popularized through booklets and prints composed by these communities themselves, and also through the political discourses of activists and leaders belonging to the literate section of Dalit communities. These then percolate down to the illiterate section through various modes of transmission, as has been discussed in the previous chapter.

In the political scenario that has emerged in the wake of the BSP, many castes that earlier had violent and contesting relations, are now redefining their identities to come close to each other and forge a unity. This can be seen in the case of two major Dalit castes in UP namely the Chamars and the Pasis who have always had an antagonistic relationship. Historically, the Pasis were the watchmen and stick wielders (*lathail*) of feudal landlords. This often forced them to beat up the Chamars at the behest of their masters. This had made the two castes traditionally enemies of the other.[1] But today in the new political environment created by the BSP, which is compelling the Pasis and the Chamars to come together under the same political umbrella, the Pasis claim that if they had not beaten the Chamars, the upper castes would have themselves beaten them, which would have been worse. The sticks of the Pasis thus saved the

Copyright © 2006. SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

Chamars from the sticks of the upper castes.[2] Today the Dalits link all the heroes who are symbols of Dalit identity with themselves, irrespective of the caste they belong to. This was observed in the narrative of Bhullar; a Chamar living in Shahabpur, a village in UP. While narrating the history of the Chamar caste, Bhullar also narrated the story of Eklavya, who the Nishads claim as belonging to their caste, and the story of Dr Ambedkar, who was a Mahar from Maharashtra.[3] This shows that Bhullar and people like him had extended their caste identity to a broader Dalit identity under the influence of the BSP. This feeling has also permeated into the Nishads who earlier considered themselves to be above the Chamars and Pasis in the caste hierarchy and used to look down upon them as being low (*heya*). Today under the sway of BSP politics, the Nishads, Chamars and Pasis all came to be seen as Dalits and should, therefore, live together in harmony and fight unitedly for their common cause. This sentiment was voiced by Avinash Choudhry, a Nishad organic intellectual, living in Kidganj, Allahabad, on the banks of the river Ganga.[4]

It is thus evident that a broad category of Dalits is emerging under the influence of the BSP. To strengthen and develop this category, the individual castes that were earlier antagonistic to each other, have been renarrating their caste histories so as to link themselves with the others. This phenomenon may be seen as the formation of electoral alliances of castes that were historically deprived of political benefits. This seems to be operating at two levels. The first is at the grass-roots level where political polarization has been taking place between the different castes because of the emergence of democratic electoral opportunities. The second is the formation of a political unity among the SCs, STs and the OBCs by the BSP. To attain this unity, the BSP first aroused the caste identities of each marginalized caste using their caste heroes and histories, and then unified them by creating a metanarrative of Dalit history with the help of symbols picked out from their master base of caste heroes, myths and legends of each caste. As shown in the earlier chapters, this metanarrative was used to homogenize all the Dalit castes by showing the universal ill-treatment of the lower castes by the upper castes. It claimed that this ill-treatment was sanctioned in the ancient Hindu texts, especially the *Manu Samhita*, which is the Brahminical code of conduct documented by a saint called Manu, which is still believed and followed consciously or unconsciously by most upper-caste Hindus, expecially in the Hindi heartland of UP and Bihar (Bharti 1997: 87). The essence of *Manu Samhita*, also called *Manuvad* by the BSP is that the lower castes or Shudras and women as a category, irrespective of their caste, should not have access to education, wealth and other aspects of human rights.

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

The code espoused by him consigned Shudras and women to an inferior position that was devoid of basic respect as human beings. The Dalits too had accepted their inferior position in society as a punishment for their sins in a former life, which was the explanation given to them by the upper castes. While mobilizing them, the BSP demanded restitution for these historical injustices in the form of reservation or protective discrimination in education and jobs. The historical debate on the division of ancient Indian society based on the Brahminical cultural code constituted a major plank in the BSP's political discourse (Singh 1994: 13).

Today the BSP, under the leadership of Mayawati, is now trying to widen its mass base by forming political alliances even with its sworn enemies like the Brahmins, Thakurs and Banias. Earlier the contestation was between Brahminism and the non-Brahminic caste forces; but now, under the compulsions of new challenges posed by electoral politics in UP, the BSP is allowing the participation of even the Brahminical castes, in their agenda of strengthening identity politics. Since the beginning of 2005, the party has been organizing Brahmin conferences, Yadav conferences, Sahu conferences and many more caste conferences in various parts of UP to redefine the identities of these castes and bring them under the fold of *Dalit-Bahujan* politics which they have now termed '*Sarvajan*' (all the people) to include even the upper castes (Bharti 2004: 103). The shift in the Dalit discourse can be seen through the changes in slogans before 2005 and after 2005. Earlier the slogan of BSP was '*Tilak, Taraju aur Talwar, Inko maro joote char*' (Tilak, symbol of Brahmins; Taraju, symbol of Banias and Talwar, symbol of the Thakurs, beat them four times with shoes) (Kumar and Sinha 2001). Now the slogan to co-opt the upper castes is '*Haathi nahi Ganesh hai, Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh hai'* (Elephant, symbol of BSP, now represents Ganesh; Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh, the trio of Hindu Vedic gods are now the gods of the BSP too) (Anand 2005). Their slogan to include the Banias in their fold is '*Bahujan, Mahajan, Bhai Bhai*' (Bahujan, Mahajan, the popular name of Banias, are brothers).[5] One can clearly observe the political efforts to provide politically correct meanings to the caste identities of these new entrants within the BSP's fold and to overcome caste contestations by moulding and reinterpreting the past to suit its political agenda.

Imagination, Nation and Communities

The imagination of communities about their nation developed with the rise and growth of the print culture. Benedict Anderson (1983),

Copyright © 2006. SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

Peter Van der Veer (1991) and others rightly suggest that the modern nation cannot be imagined without the collective simultaneity of the private act of reading, made possible by print capitalism. Anderson emphasizes on the development of newspapers, books and administrative bureaucracies that made it possible for millions of people to 'imagine' themselves as part of the same community or nation. According to him, the remarkable redefinition of identities resulted from cultural transformations that evolved along with new technologies for distributing information in the early modern era. New technologies disseminated new cultural narratives in newspapers and novels, all of which 'created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation.' By reading stories about their nations in schools, and in books and newspapers, individuals came to imagine and identify with public communities that were vastly larger than the local worlds in which they lived their daily lives (Kramer 1997). This imagination evoked through the print media does not work exclusively but has close interaction with the oral imagination of the people. When communities imagine themselves through print they remember many things from their oral memories and they also create many new elements that are added to the oral memory of the people.

The process of imagining the nation by the Dalits became faster with the rise and growth of literacy, print technology and the act of writing among marginalized communities. They mostly imagined their nation in the historical biographies of their national heroes and freedom fighters, who, in their perception, played a greater role in freeing and developing the nation than did the conventional heroes of the nationalist movement. They also wrote small historical novels that showed the role of some Dalit castes in the freedom struggle. Through these novels they narrated their sacrifice and role in the freedom movement of the nation, while also expressing their disillusionment with the newly emerged nation. Through the narration of these stories a space in the nation-making process is carved out. Despite this, they also reflect unfulfilled desires and aspirations. While narrating about the history of their role in the national struggle, their narrative appears to be a critical dialogue with the contemporary state, different from an idealist, emotional, elite narrative type. The past, which is narrated by mainstream academic historians and nationalist leaders, does not provide much space to the marginalized communities for their own narrative of the past. That is why they successfully attempt to invent their past by writing popular (hi)stories based on their role in the process of nation making. Their claiming to a large role in the nation-making

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

process has helped them to demand an appropriate share in the democratic processes of the nation-state. This is an alternative construction of the idea of the nation, which is different from the idea constructed by many post-colonial states using nationalist myths and sentiments that help to control, suppress and discriminate against minority groups.

Ideas of nationalism are important factors for connecting people to the nation-state. These linkages of the nationalist narratives with the practice and power of the nation-state make nationalism one of the most powerful forces in contemporary modern society. Nationalism influences many competing marginalized communities to link themselves with the nationalist narrative. One problem that becomes visible in this process is that the struggle for space within the nationalist narrative compels the Dalits to prove themselves to be more nationalist than others. For the castes who aspire to alternative politics, this may sometimes lead to their absorption in the dominant metanarrative which is the politics of the dominant elite sections.

When communities narrate about the nation, an element of imagination about the nation-building process always prevails. As suggested by Hans Kohn, nationalism is a 'state of mind, an act of consciousness' (Kohn 1944: 10). For the Dalits to make their presence felt in the nation-making process it was important that their role in this process be acknowledged in the pages of history. That is why they tried to create their own space within the existing framework of the narrative of Indian nationalism. Nationalism becomes, in this context, a modern ideological expression of their quest for social recognition. It provided a practical, this-worldly solution to their problem so as to put an end to their sense of alienation in society.

This premise of nation as an invented category which assumed the notion of the 'modern' and of being 'mentally constructed' was proposed by Carlton Hayes and Hans Kohn (quoted in Palti 2001). The imaginary or invented construction of the nation is not a mere fictitious act but is, in fact, anterior to any other 'ideological construction' (ibid.). That is why one can find various types of imaginary constructions about the nation in the narratives created by the Dalits.

Multiple Meanings of the Nation

This need to link the Dalits with the nationalist narratives is reflected in the ideological statements of Kanshi Ram, founder of the BSP. He called

Copyright © 2006. SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

his movement a real nationalist step. He also explains his views on national unity by saying that for him the meaning of national unity is to correct the social imbalance. He perceived the move to unite the Dalits as an essential prerequisite for national unity. He believed that the true meaning of the formation of the nation-state was to provide a fair share for the Bahujans in state power and administration. He alleged that Brahminism decelerated the process of nation making by dividing the Dalits into fragments for its own vested interest (Singh 1994: 58).

The story of nationalism as narrated by the Dalits not only expresses their desire to be a part of the nation-building process, but also reflects their inner aspirations to emerge as an important and active group in the process of social modernization. While explaining the Dalits' urge to link themselves with the narrative of nationalism in the present context, Mata Prasad, an important Dalit leader of UP, opined that Indian society still believed that the Dalits have made no significant contribution to the history of the Indian freedom struggle and that they demand reservations and privileges from the post-colonial state without even having played a significant role in the freedom struggle so as to justify such privileges. But studies undertaken by intellectuals make it clear that the people of this community did play an active role in the 1857 Rebellion and in the various other phases of the Indian freedom struggle (quoted in Dinkar 1990). These kinds of narratives linking the Dalits with the narrative of the Indian freedom struggle are necessary for them to justify their demand for special privileges from the post-independent Indian State.

Dalit intellectuals and political leaders perceive Dalit history as a source of inspiration for these castes (Chaudhury 1997). Identifying their role in the freedom struggle was a part of their urge to build their self-confidence, as an inspiration to develop their future course of action which was to enhance their social status, and to construct their self-identity. Besides this, an added interest was to establish a logic for their demand from the State for reservation, scholarship and also to corner a major share in the development projects. The basis of these narratives was that the communities that had played an important role in the freedom struggle were still backward. They asserted that it was the duty of the State to pay more attention towards their development than to the development of other communities (Manohara 1989: 16). The views that were disseminated through their narratives, reflected through their speeches, political pamphlets, booklets and general discussions, were that it was the moral duty of the State to fulfil all their demands. Through these narratives they wanted to establish that what they were getting from the State was not enough to compensate for their sacrifices in the freedom struggle (ibid.).

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

The construction of Dalit narratives was based on a sense of self-respect. The emotional requirement of social prestige was both a product and a cause of their long-suffered social ignorance and dissatisfaction. For acquiring social respect, it was important for them to ensure that those things, which are a matter of pride for their community were glorified, and that the prevalent notion, that their lower status is because of their immorality, as defined by Brahminical canons, was reversed. The identity created through their narratives of the past by the Dalits renders instable the canons determined by Brahminism for granting status in society, such as purity-pollution beliefs, birth-based ascription, specific caste characterization and caste hierarchy, and status ascription. Status, prestige and honour-mobility concern individuals as well as groups because they constitute a stable criterion for social differentiation. They are elements of subjective consciousness that are based more upon ascription, values and styles of life than on objective criteria. These notions were the result of the desires and aspirations that emerged among the educated lower-caste social groups. Many social groups that had not realised their latent potentials and were unaware of political changes taking place in society became aware of their own power. This led to a feeling of unity and fraternity among these groups, which also gave rise to the understanding of the meaning of democracy as being given the opportunity to move forward socially. This sense also played a determinate role in the creation of a new Dalit narrative.

This phenomenon can be observed in Dalit caste history writing. The emergence of lower-caste authors and readers presupposed a certain spread of formal education. Schools of the 'modern' or colonial kind gave importance to the study of history, which was absent from the curricula of the traditional *pathshala*s (schools). This emphasis on history could have been the fundamental reason for the need for 'historical' arguments expressed in the early 20th century caste tracts by the Dalit authors. The emergence of the print medium and the associated rise of vernacular prose and the variety and affordability of printed texts, facilitated the emergence of a public sphere that included a growing number of women and a sprinkling of lower-caste men. Another closely related factor was the development, from around the turn of the century, of open argumentation that extended beyond the boundaries of traditional high-caste male literati, on a number of issues, including, notably, caste issues. Economic changes altered the status of various occupations and social groups as well as modes of production. This change in the social pattern also brought about awareness about nationalism because nationalists often

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

Copyright © 2006. SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

attracted followers from groups that were losing or seeking to gain social status. Nationalism thus became and still becomes a modern, ideological expression of the perennial human quest for social recognition and it appeals most to those people who feel least respected.

These narratives build up an alternate history in which Dalits are at the centre. In this process of identity construction, there is usually an 'other,' which is constructed for establishing one's own logic and narrative power. In other words, in the power struggle that has been going on with the other castes, the aim of the Dalits is to capture more space and win the most opportunities to become developed and respectable. In these historical stories, all the communities are placed in a hierarchical order with their own community on the top rung. Tendencies such as these can be seen in the writings of Dalit historians like Vidrohi (2004), Pasi (1998), Madan (1987), Dinkar (1990), Nath (1998a, 1998b) and so on. According to their narration of history, they attempt to establish that the development of the present Indian nation and all its infrastructural development has been possible only due to the hard labour of the Dalits and the untouchables. They argue that the untouchables were roped in for the construction of railways and bridges and were made to work day and night. If they were unable to work due to ill health or fatigue, they were still made to suffer great hardships. The railway track from Karachi to Kolkata and from Shimla to Rameshwaram was laid on the blood, sweat and sacrifice of millions of untouchables. Only because of their back breaking labour was it possible to link the whole of the country by railways (Dinkar 1990: 140).

In their own narratives, the Dalits did not like to believe that the nationalist consciousness that they had developed was a result of the speeches, discourses and political actions of Mahatma Gandhi. Instead, they preferred to believe that this consciousness developed within their community as a result of their continuous struggle against social, political, cultural and economic inequalities. A consciousness about their exploitation, atrocities and injustice was generated within them, which helped them to develop the power to fight against this exploitation. They became more concerned about their own well being and also became concerned about the freedom of their motherland. This awareness was what led to many encounters with the British (Madan 1987: 16).

DALIT MEMORIES OF 1857

The Dalits have an emotional link with the 1857 War of Independence for they believe that it was initiated by them. They claim that it was the

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

Soldier Revolt by the mostly Dalit Indian soldiers of the British Army that took place in Jhansi in 1857, that snowballed into the War of Independence. It was a War of Independence since the Dalits were fighting for their motherland rather than to gain power. The war was led by Bhau Bakshi and Puran Kori and with them was Jhalkaribai who fought bravely against the British for the sake of her motherland (Dinkar 1990: 62). The Dalit narrative of the first freedom struggle is filled with stories about brave women martyrs belonging to suppressed communities, such as Jhalkaribai, Avantibai, Pannadhai, Udadevi and Mahaviridevi (ibid.: 27). According to them, the 1857 War of Independence, which the elites claim was started by Mangal Pandey, was actually inspired by Matadin Bhangi. The story is narrated in such a manner that Matadin Bhangi emerges as the source of inspiration for the revolt.

Their narrative is as follows:

There was a factory in Barrackpore where cartridges were manufactured. Many of the workers of this factory belonged to the untouchable communities. One day one of the workers felt thirsty. He asked a soldier for a mug of water. That soldier was Mangal Pandey. Mangal Pandey refused him water because the worker was an untouchable. This was very humiliating for the worker. He retaliated to the Brahmin soldier saying,
'Bara awa hai Brahaman ka beta. Jin kartuson ka tum upayog karat ho, unpar gaaye or suar ki charbi lagawal jaat hai, jinhe tum apan daatun se torkar banduk mein bharat ho. O samay tomhar jati aur dharam kahan jawat. Dhikkar tumhare is brahmanatwa ka.' (You claim to be a highly respectable Brahmin, but the cartridges which you bite with your teeth and insert in your guns, are all rubbed with the fat of cows and pigs. What happens to your caste and religion then? Curse on your Brahminism.)

Hearing this the soldier was taken by surprise. That untouchable was none other than Matadin Bhangi, who opened the eyes of the Indian soldier and ignited the first spark of India's independence in the cantonment. The words of Matadin Bhangi spread like wildfire through the cantonment. Very soon the torch of independence was lighted. On the morning of 1 March 1857, Mangal Pandey broke the line during the parade. Accusing the British of spoiling their religious sentiments, he started firing indiscriminately at them. This was the moment when the first battle lines against the British were drawn. Mangal Pandey was arrested in an injured condition. He was court-martialed, and in 1857 he was hanged from the gallows before all the soldiers. Mangal Pandey's sacrifice became an inspiration for all the soldiers. On 10 May 1857, the floodgate of the independence movement burst in Barrackpore in which many brave sons of India became martyrs. In the chargesheet that was made, the first name was

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

that of Matadin Bhangi, who was later arrested. All the arrested revolutionaries were court-martialed. Matadin was charged with treason against the British. (Dinkar 1990: 37)

S.R. Sajeevan Nath, in his book *1857 Ki Kranti Ka Janak: Nagvanshi Bhangi Matadin Hela*, also narrates a similar story in which Matadin Bhangi is seen to be the father (*janak*) of the 1857 Rebellion. In these narratives, Matadin Bhangi is presented as the moving force behind the 1857 Revolt. They also try to show how the forward class refused to hand a glass of water to the untouchables although they bit cartridges rubbed with cow's fat. Thus, these narratives, along with a description of the nationalist movement, questions the hierarchical structure of the Indian society. The rigid structure that disallows the untouchables to go near the forward castes because of their low birth and ritual 'dirtiness' is strongly criticized. To prove the historicity of this event, a book written by one Shri Acharya Bhagwan Deb called *The immortal revolutionaries of India*, has been quoted by Dinkar (ibid.: 38).

The memory of Matadin Bhangi and his contribution to the nationalist movement is celebrated in a number of ways by the Dalits. Many songs have been composed in his honour that are sung in rallies and functions, both cultural and political. Plays are staged at commemorative functions held in his honour in towns and villages. Special issues of magazines are brought out with articles by eminent writers highlighting his contributions. A fortnightly newspaper *Dalit Kesari* published a special issue on the 1857 Revolt in which the lead article was on Matadin Bhangi.[6] *Anarya Bharat*, another Dalit newspaper that is published from Mainpuri in UP, brought out a special feature on the contribution of Dalits to the 1857 Revolt. In all these publications they projected Matadin Bhangi as a pioneer of the First War of Indian Independence. *Himayati*, a Dalit literary magazine, in its May 1996 issue that celebrated the memory of 1857, published a special feature and lead article on the contribution of Matadin Bhangi. In the same issue, Dr Sohanpal Sumanshankar wrote very strongly that the first person who sowed the seeds of the 1857 Rebellion was Matadin Bhangi but, unfortunately, historians have forgotten his contribution.[7]

In this manner, the elite nationalist history has been subverted by the Dalits in their favour. Kuar Singh, Tantya Tope and Nana Saheb do not figure in the Dalit narrative of the 1857 freedom struggle. The people who do figure are Chetram Jatav, Balluram Mehtar, Banke Chamar and Vira Pasi, who were martyrs born in the lower strata of society. Although the elite nationalist heroes are not negated, they are ignored in the Dalit

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

narratives. Their emphasis is on the sacrifice of the Dalit martyrs of the nation who sacrificed their lives despite their low birth and poor socio-economic status. Their brave confrontation with the British has also been high-lighted. The story of Balluram Mehtar and Chetram Jatav has been de-scribed in the following manner:

> Although the dalits were born in the lowest caste of the Indian caste hierarchy and suffered great hardship because of their poor socio-economic status, they never sold themselves for their country. No one can accuse a single dalit of doing so. Whenever the need arose, they sacrificed their lives for their mother-land. Among the brave sons of the country, the names of Balluram Mehtar and Chetram Jatav are written in shining letters. As soon as the news of the Barrackpore revolution reached the people, a mob of revolutionaries took to the streets. Mr. Phillips, who was an officer of the Eta district, tried to control the mob. On 26 May 1857, in the Soro region of Eta district, Chetram Jatav and Balluram Mehtar joined into the Barrackpore revolution without caring for their lives. In this revolution, Sadashiv Mehre, Chaturbhuj Vaish etc. were also present. Chetram Jatav and Balluram, who were the moving forces behind the revolution, were tied to trees and shot. The rest were hung from trees in the Kasganj area. (Dinkar 1990: 56)

The bravery of martyr Banke Chamar is also described. He lived in village Kuarpur, Macchli Shahar, *janpad* Jaunpur. When the revolution failed, the British declared Banke Chamar and eighteen of his associates as *baghi*s (revolutionaries). Banke Chamar was ordered to be hanged after being arrested. Thus, this brave revolutionary laid down his life for the country (ibid.: 59).

Amar Shaheed Vira Pasi is another Dalit who is remembered as a brave warrior in the Dalit narrative. He was a security guard of Raja Beni Madhav Singh of Murar Mau, in Rae Bareli, Uttar Pradesh. Raja Beni Madhav Singh was arrested for taking part in the revolt. One night, Vira Pasi entered the prison and helped the king escape. This was a big insult to the British administration. They decided to capture Vira Pasi dead or alive, and placed a reward of Rs 50,000 on his head. However, they were unable to capture him (ibid.: 64).

Another story that narrates their role in the 1857 movement is situated in the village Magarwara, about 10 km from Unnao on the Lucknow high-way. They claim that on 20 July 1857, a small battalion of the British army under the leadership of General Henry Havelock was passing through Magarwara to help another battalion that had got stuck in the Residency.

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

Nearly 2,000 Pasis came out of their hamlets and pelted the battalion with stones, which forced the battalion to return to the Kanpur cantonment. On 4 August 1857, the same battalion came to the village, this time with a lot of preparations. When the Pasis of Magarwara tried to stop them from moving forward a battle ensued and nearly 2,000 Pasis were killed (Pasi 1998: 34).

Yet another story narrated by the Pasis is situated in village Bani on the banks of the river Sai, close to Magarwara. This region consisted of many small Pasi hamlets. When the British army passed by this highway it faced a stiff resistance from the Pasis. Angered by this, the British officers asked the Pasis to vacate the area within five minutes. When the Pasis refused, the British announced that they would blow up the hamlets with canons. This caused great alarm. People ran helter skelter to save themselves and their families but despite this many Pasis were killed in the canon firing. The British found this region very salubrious and decided to build a fort where their soldiers, who had faced stiff resistance by the Pasis after leaving the Kanpur cantonment, could rest and restore their vigour. This story is a part of the collective memory and oral tradition of the Pasis of that region and is often presented in plays and songs. The song goes:

Bani bani kati bani, ban ke bigri bani
Angrezon ke tope se urhi, phir bani rahi bani.

(Translated)

(The village Bani was made, then destroyed,
again made and again destroyed;
the cannon balls of the British blew it apart,
then Bani was once again made and remained Bani.)

The story further narrates that the next day General Havelock once again moved forward with his troop to free the soldiers trapped in the Residency. Once again he had to face the wrath of the Indian freedom fighters, this time at the Alambagh Bhavya Bhawan. Many soldiers, both Indian and British, lost their lives in this battle. When the general reached Dilkushabagh, he had to fight the Indian freedom fighters again. These incidents took a toll on the British soldiers and drained the energy of General Havelock. He fell ill and finally succumbed to his illness on 24 November 1857. He was buried at the British Cemetary in Alambagh

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

(Pasi 1998). This story is documented as part of the contributions of the Pasis in the freedom struggle of the country, from where it is once again orally transmitted into the collective memory of the Dalits.

Another story that is narrated with pride is about Makka Pasi, the husband of Udadevi, who, like his wife, laid down his life for the sake of the country. The incident took place on 10 June 1857, when a small battalion of British soldiers under the leadership of Henry Lawrence was passing through Barabanki on their way to Chinhat from Avadh. In a village called Chinhat, Makka Pasi gathered an army of 200 Pasis and killed many British soldiers. Sensing a danger in him, Captain Lawrence shot Makka Pasi to stop him from killing more soldiers. The Pasis claim that Udadevi and Makka Pasi as a couple is the only example in world history where both the partners become martyrs. This couple has elevated the pride and glory not just of the Pasi community but also the entire country. Every Indian should be proud of such a couple that has made such a supreme sacrifice for their country (Pasi 2005: 90–91).

The Dalits, through their narratives of the 1857 Rebellion, have not only tried to establish their own heroes, but also tried to dethrone the existing high-caste heroes from the mainstream narratives. In their narratives they present the high castes as traitors and conspirators, and communities which were dishonest to their motherland. Through these narratives they also want to prove that by capturing history, these traitors of the nation now appear as the most nationalist of communities and have become the most influential sections after independence.

In the story of Jhalkaribai too, the Dalits did not recognize Rani Laxmibai as a martyr in an attempt to prove that she was hungry for power. According to the story she did not want to go against the British. It was only under the influence of Jhalkaribai that she agreed to revolt. At the end of the 1857 struggle, she did not become a martyr, she only hid herself in the estate of Pratapgarh.[8]

The historicity of these narratives is questionable, but the politics behind the creation and narration of these stories is to dethrone the established heroes of the mainstream narratives. A three-dimensional discursive strategy was adopted to achieve this aim. The first was to make allegations about the distortion, by mainstream writings, of the events of the 1857 struggle. The second was to establish their own heroes as freedom fighters who fought for their motherland. The third was to prove that *zamindar*s, feudal lords, and the wealthy classes of the society were conspirators of the British. The educated Indian intelligentsia was also to be established as conspiring with the British. In the preface of his booklet

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

Sepoy Mutiny (1857–58): An Indian Perfidy, A.K. Biswas, a Dalit from West Bengal who later became an IAS officer, wrote:

> The Indian history has been subjected to calculated distortion at the hands of educated Indians. Instances are galore in many walks of life. The Sepoy Mutiny (1857–58), though not even two centuries old and though there is vast mass of contemporary literatures, has suffered the same mindless perversion, truth has been swept under the carpet. In other words, it has not been allowed to come to the light. The Sepoy Mutiny is hailed today universally as the first war of Indian Independence when the mutineers unfurled the banner of revolt against a mighty Empire. The contemporary literature, however, gives a very different, rather baffling, picture, the sepoys have been held therein as seditious, perfidious, evil and wrong doers, etc [*sic*]. They were condemned in strongest terms by Indian journalists who are held as pioneers and doyen. The feudal class, on the other hand lent strong moral and material support to the imperial forces which crushed the uprising. The glaring contradiction does not find any mention in the textbooks of history of our times for reasons not far to seek, nor is it known to the generation of the day. (Biswas 1997)

Through these narratives of the past, the Dalits want to acquire power in the ongoing social struggle. It is also an attempt to reshape the fractured and competing pasts from the present and acquire a position of authority for themselves and other Dalit castes. This process of remaking the past is based on their contemporary, socio-political and cultural experience of discrimination, which they face in their everyday lives. They link their experiences of recent times with their remote past and authenticate the latter by establishing their historicity. Invention of history for the Dalits is thus a process of giving legitimacy to their identity by establishing sacrifice for the nation and the society as a tradition of their community. In this sense, one can propose that the past can be an authority but the nature of the authority is seen as shifting, amorphous and amenable to intervention.

The Dalits also mention the names of freedom fighters from the Gandhian and Nehruvian era, men and women who became martyrs at Jalianwalabagh, in the Non-Cooperation Movement, the Quit India Movement, the Chauri Chaura episode and so on. But in their popular discourse, one cannot find heroes who were involved in these phases. Dalit freedom fighters like *Amar Shaheed* Ram Chandra Bhangi (Movement against the Rowlatt Act, 1918), *Amar Shaheed* Nathu Dhobi (Jalianwala Bagh episode, 1919), *Amar Shaheed* Duli Dhobi, Mangal Mochi, Ramapati Chamar, Chhotu Pasi, Ayodhya Chamar, Sampati Chamar, Alghu Pasi

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

(Chauri Chaura incident,1923), Kallu Chamar, Shri Garib Chamar, Jagesar Chamar, Nahar Chamar, Falai Chamar, Birija Chamar, Medhai Chamar, Raghunath Pasi, Ramjas Pasi, Ramsharan Pasi are some names who participated in the freedom struggle, especially in the second phase of the nationlist movement. Dalit historians also present stories of *Amar Shaheed* Baldev Prasad Kuril (Derapur, Kanpur), *Amar Shaheed* Suchit Ram Jaiswar (Lal Kuan, Lucknow) and *Krantiveer* Vindeshwari (Gorakhpur), who played important roles in the Civil Disobedience Movement. In the same manner, they believe that in Vinoba Bhave's Satyagraha Movement, Baba din Kori (Mohanlal Ganj) and Narayandas Chamar, played an important role. They narrate stories of the sacrifices of *Amar Shaheed* Maikulal Chamar (Sitapur), *Amar Shaheed* Shivdhan Chamar (Azamgarh) and *Amar Shaheed* Hari Chamar (Balia) in the Quit India Movement of 1942 (Dinkar 1990: 41), but they do not appear important enough to be converted into icons. Almost all the Dalit icons, heroes and myths of the national movement belong to the 1857 episode.

Why is it important for the Dalits to link themselves with the 1857 war of independence and why are the icons related with this incident given more importance than those of other incidents? Why is 1857 so important for them? The reason may be that the events around this period are not well documented, so the Dalits find plenty of space to invent their history and posit their leaders. The 1857 Revolt is highly romantic with a lot of heroic characters who fought valiantly against the British using indigeneous weapons. This notion provides the opportunity to create heroic characters belonging to their community whose authenticity may be debatable but who can, nevertheless, stir up the imagination of people searching for heroes with whom they can identify. The events that took place in the 20th century on the other hand are very well documented since the leaders of that period tried to build up a unified homogeneous story of India's independence. This gave little space to the Dalits since the story was dominated by upper-caste leaders whom they had to follow. It is true that many lower castes lost their lives in the Non-Cooperation, Quit India and other such movements but the glory went to the upper-caste leaders who had organized them.

The 1857 movement was mainly confined to the northern part of India, which made it easier for the Dalits of this region to search for heroes so as to invent and situate their heroes in places with a heavy concentration of lower castes like in Awadh, Bundelkhand and Bhojpur. The memory of these events were not just part of Dalit memory but also a part of the broader collective memory of the region, which is reflected in the songs,

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

Copyright © 2006. SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

plays and other mediums of popular culture. This fact enabled the Dalits to invent their heroes and histories who could become both local heroes and identity markers for the entire community in its everyday struggle for dignity and self-respect. The Dalit leaders had understood that it was of paramount importance to link themselves with the nationalist narrative and assert their role in the freedom struggle. However they found it difficult to find space in the main phase of the freedom movement since, in the period when the struggle for dalit uplift had picked up momentum, their leader Dr Ambedkar had developed a rift with Mahatma Gandhi, the most important leader of this phase. Thus there was no option but to search for their heroes in the 1857 Rebellion so as not to antagonize the state, which legitimized the nationalist narrative. Since one of the catalysts for the emergence of a Dalit nationalist narrative was dialogue with the state, they could not afford to ignore it. They could neither negate Ambedkar and his narrative of the nationalist movement nor the dominant nationalist narrative which is projected as the foundation of the present state. The need to strike a balance between the two led the Dalits to search for their own heroes within the nationalist narrative. And the event which provides them the space to do so was the 1857 struggle.

Another reason why the Dalits found it crucial to link themselves with the 1857 struggle was to counter the allegations made by some intellectuals associated with the BJP that the Dalits were anti-national. According to these intellectuals, Ambedkar was against the mainstream nationalist movement led by Mahatma Gandhi and often supported the British. These idealogues tried to belittle the untouchables by stating that they conquered India for the British—the Dusadhs and Baheliyas fought for Lord Clive in the Battle of Plassey in 1757.[9] In a bid to oppose Dalit efforts to write their own history and rupture the mainstream nationalist narrative, the All India History Compilation Project, formed by the RSS for propagating history based on the RSS idealogy, held a convention between 17 and 19 July 1999 in Allahabad. In this convention the custodian, Moreshwar Neelkanth Pingale, opined that writing the history of Shudras, *gwala*s and tribals created hatred among sections of society and caused problems for an Indianized social life.[10] In reaction to statements like these the Dalits were compelled to assert their role in the 1857 Revolt. They stated that their association with the first war gave them an exalted position in the history of India's nation building.

That there was a difference in opinion among the members of the BJP-RSS was obvious when the Governor of UP, Suraj Bhan, in the same convention, rebuked those attempting to deny the role of the Dalits

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

in the freedom struggle and said that they had contributed, to their greatest possible extent, in the movement for independence. He added that if it was not for Balmiki, the writer of *Ramayana* who belonged to a Dalit community, no one would have known about Rama and Sita. He also mentioned the name of Jhalkaribai who in the guise of Rani of Jhansi, fought valiantly against the British in the first war of independence.[11]

Dalit politicians and Dalit intellectuals use history, memories and icons of 1857 in their discourses in various ways. First, when caste conferences are organised as an urge for identity construction, they publish posters and handbills in which the contribution of their caste heroes in the 1857 struggle is mentioned.[12] Second, they justify their demands from the State as reward for their role in the 1857 movement.[13] Third, during election campaigns, the BSP leaders highlight the contribution of those heroes of the 1857 movement who belong to the caste which they are addressing. Fourth, many castes, in their mass struggle against the prejudices harboured by the state, publish posters and pamphlets in which they mention their role in the 1857 freedom struggle. Many castes are still considered criminal tribes on the basis of old colonial acts that continue to be followed by the police although they have now been abolished. Such castes say that when the upper castes were busy collaborating with the British to earn titles of *Rai Bahadur* and grabbing land that belonged to Dalit ancestors, they (the Dalits) were fighting against the British. In anger, the British branded them as criminal tribes under the Criminal Tribe Acts of 1871, 1896, 1901–02, 1909, 1911, 1913–14, 1919 and 1924. Although these tribes have now been denotified, whenever a criminal activity takes place, the police, acting on preconceived notions, first arrests members of these tribes (Dinkar 1990: 46). In reaction to this kind of State atrocity, these communities organize protests and publish posters and handbills in which they mention their role in the 1857 movement.

Among the many heroes projected, why did women warriors such as Jhalkaribai, Udadevi and so on, who were involved with the 1857 Rebellion emerge as icons of Dalit political mobilizations in Uttar Pradesh? One reason might be that when Dalit politicians, especially Kanshi Ram, set out to choose icons from among those present in the print culture written by Dalit writers in the 1960s to rupture the mainstream nationalist narrative, they chose women icons on whom they could carve the image of Mayawati as a powerful mass leader of the community. Since a woman was to be projected as a charismatic mass leader, the icons chosen were also women who were chivalrous and powerful and who could provide

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

symbolic power to Mayawati's image carving. The women were called *viranganas* (courageous woman) but, in the narratives and visuals, the womanly aspect was removed and only the chivalrous aspect was highlighted. In popular parlance they emerged as *veer* (chivalrous man) to glorify Mayawati's masculine qualities. Mayawati is addressed as *Behenji* (sister) by her followers, but for them the word is more an honorific term of address rather than a sign of her feminity. Mayawati's strategy also was to project herself as a brave and courageous person. Her style of speaking, epistemology of political language, everyday relations with bureaucrats and politicians is masculine and aggressive and free of feminine softness. Her attitude deconstructs the stereotypical notions about women. Contrary to this, the BJP portrays women as mothers or sisters having feminine qualities of sacrifice and self-effacement. These qualities have been glorified in religious texts and also in mainstream literature penned by authors like Maithilisharan Gupt (*abala nari teri yehi kahani, achal mein hai doodh aur ankhon mein hai pani*, vulnerable women, this is your story; in your breast there is milk, in your eyes there is water).

Kanshi Ram and Mayawati picked out Dalit courageous, warrior-like heroines from the 1857 movement as they would suit the image of Mayawati. By linking herself with these heroes, Mayawati wanted to give herself a place in the nationalist narrative and project her warrior-like characteristics so as to successfully engage in political battles with the SP and the BJP in contemporary politics. This may be another reason why warrior-like Dalit heroes with masculine images were chosen as icons. In government publications published during Mayawati's reign to highlight her achievements, these icons were portrayed as 'heroes' rather than heroines.[14]

Politics, Identity and Narrative

The Dalit ideologues and political leaders have been using the myths and stories of these heroines in different ways to assert their rights. One use of these stories is to put pressure on the Indian State to provide more benefits to the Dalits. The discursive strategy behind this kind of historical representation is to create a sense of guilt among the policy makers and leaders and thereby get more benefits from them. The Dalit leaders say that although freedom was won mainly by the effort of the Bahujans, the forward castes reap the benefits of that freedom. In the colonial period, the Dalits received fair justice from the British. Now, however, they are

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

being subjected to injustices. The Brahminists have hatched a conspiracy to let the dalits remain dependent and oppressed and not allow them to develop wealth, knowledge and self-esteem. They claim that the downfall of the dalits began after independence when the forward castes misused the independence to further oppress the Dalits (see Singh 1994).

This kind of play with the narrative has two uses. On the one hand, the Dalits assert their role in the national movement, while on the other hand, they criticize the nation that has emerged from that national movement. The other use of their narrative is to mobilize the Dalits and other minority communities under one political umbrella to create a vote bank and to corner a larger share in the power structure. It is interesting to note how narratives broaden the social base of parties. The Dalit narratives of nation making is based on a two-fold strategy. First, they would like to include in one narrative all the Dalits and other marginalized minority communities that have not been recognized by the mainstream nationalist narrative. Second, they would exclude forward and dominant communities and project them as selfish, opportunistic and as enemies of the nation. In this process, Dalits also began to include Muslims in their narrative. They say that the forward castes and the Brahminical system are responsible for the present poor condition of the Muslims too. During the colonial period, the Muslims were in a much better situation, but today, day by day, their condition is getting worse. The government that is dominated by Brahminical forces has been fanning communal tension with the aim of forcing the Muslims to leave the country.

The BSP, in order to make itself more inclusive and integrative and its narrative more dialogical, says that there are two classes of Muslims, high and low. Many artisan communities, like butchers, weavers and dyers, are considered to be lower by birth, while Syeds are considered to be of high birth. Kanshi Ram tried to include the low caste Muslims into the Dalit vote bank by emphasizing their lower position in Muslim society and inventing a history in which the lower ranked Muslims were lower-caste Hindus before conversion. According to statistics prepared by Dalit political analysts, in fifteen parliamentary constituencies in ten districts, Muslims are in a decisive position to tilt. In some constituencies, their population is between 21 and 47 per cent (ibid.: 8).

However it was not easy to develop a consensus on a politically carved metanarrative because the caste groups were fragmented and antagonistic with each other for socio-economic reasons. The social, economic and political tensions between some OBCs and Dalits are reflected in their caste histories and other narratives too, like in the narratives of the

Copyright © 2006. SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

Muslims and some castes like Bhangi, Dusadh and Pasi. These multiplicities and contestations in the oral narratives of the Dalits were, however, resolved in the written narratives which show homogeneity and consistency (Narayan and Mishra 2004: 23–24). The reason for this could be to build up an 'artificial memory,' writing being the precondition of the artificial memory that is called history. Levi-Strauss derived the hypothesis that the primary function of written communication is to facilitate slavery and that, therefore, writing is the instrument of human enslavement (quoted in Kelin 1995). Today, the Dalits attempt to transform their position by constructing their own histories by snatching, from the historians, the legitimacy and authority to narrate histories and handing it to Dalit activists and intellectuals. In this process they change their positions from being passive subjects as treated by professional historians to active conscious subjects. There is still, however, a problem in the representation of their own histories. The histories that are circulated through the print media freezes their historical position, makes it static, and then transforms them again into passive and silent subjects. To turn themselves into active subjects of historical representation the Dalits have to continuously deconstruct their earlier positions and write new histories based on their changing aspirations and new social struggles for survival and progress. This phenomenon has appeared in Dalit history writing but, however, in a limited way. A comparison of the historical representations found in the booklets written in the 1960s and the ones written after the implementation of the Mandal Commission in 1988 shows a changing trajectory in their representations over time.[15] The booklets written in the 1960s mainly aimed at creating a space for themselves in mainstream history by narrating the glory of their heroes and caste histories. An example is the booklet *Virangana Jhalkaribai* by Visharad (1964), which is a glorious account of the role of Jhalkaribai in the First War of Independence (ibid.: 1–66). The booklets written in the wake of the Mandal Commssion, on the other hand, were highly aggressive and justified protective discrimination by claiming that they were needed to correct the historical wrongs committed by the upper castes who had kept them suppressed and had denied them access to education. As shown in Chapter 2, these booklets posited the logic that they had been the ruling communities in the past but the conspiracies of the upper castes had deprived them of their glorious status (Pawan 1997: 14). Thus, in both the cases, the historical representations found in the booklets written by the Dalits reveal a changing trajectory over time.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

The written narratives developed by the Dalit political forces reveal a homogenization of the multiple caste and local narratives of the Dalits. They tell the history of the making of Indian society from a single narrative point that revolves around the *mool nivasi* (indigenous people) concept. They claim that the Dalits, OBCs, Muslims and tribals were the original settlers of this land, while Brahminical and forward castes were intruders. They came from other parts of the world and destroyed the habitat of the original settlers. In their invented narratives the *mool nivasi*s or the original settlers were the non-Aryans, which had been fragmented by the Aryans, leading to the downfall of the glorious Indian civilization (Singh 1994: 115)

The narratives produced a connection between the identity of the indigenous people and high civilization. This is not the identity of any particular caste but of various castes and communities called Bahujan. This is an attempt at creating a homogenous identity for heterogeneous castes and communities. The Dalit political leaders have now tried to write a new history in which they build on the racial theory of Aryans and non-Aryans and, by glorifying their past achievements, they try to negate the prevailing Brahminical notion that that the lower castes are capable only of undertaking menial jobs. They try to establish that the lower castes were rulers and makers of high civilization earlier, whereas now they are being ruled over by the Brahminical forces. The Dalit political forces thus propose that the past rulers of this nation should be given back their power. These narratives are also an attempt to emotionally unite the Dalits under one identity that could create a homogeneity within them. In order to include Muslims within this fold, Dalit politicians claim that the majority of the Muslims, that is, nearly 80 per cent, were the original settlers of India who had converted to Islam due to the oppression and injustice of the Brahminical system. Thus they too should join hands with the Bahujan Samaj and fight for their rights and dignity (ibid.: 65). The narrative points of the above mentioned politically motivated Dalit history are strongly influenced by the writings of western colonial historians and missionary activists-cum-ethnographers. In fact during the colonial period, many modernist and colonial state interventionists prepared the space in which dalits could think about their identity. In search of their identity the Dalits moved towards an image created for them by western colonialists and missionaries. The concept of *mool nivasi*, which appears in their historical discourse, is in fact heavily influenced by the missionary and colonial constructions of the history of the lower castes in Indian society.

Copyright © 2006. SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

It should be mentioned that it is not easy to find the *mool nivasi* discourse in the oral tradition of Dalit communities in northern India. It is a constructed history that appears in print and may percolate down to the grass roots in the future (Singh 1994).

The homogeneous metanarrative proposed by Dalit political forces as history may not allow for the heterogeneity that lies in the orality of various castes, communities and groups of the Dalits. It is however a political need for them to create a big alliance to fight against domination by the Brahminical forces in Indian society. In recent times, the field for power struggle among various groups in Indian society is the electoral democracy, which relies on the number game. That is why there is a need to broaden their mass base by narrating a metahistory for which they could include narratives of various groups and communities. This is, in fact, a political alliance formed by the alliance of narratives. Like other metanarratives, it is an attempt at institutionalization and legitimization and giving it a position of intellectual mastery. However the metanarrative, as proposed by the Dalits, is also a tool to subvert the position of dominance by the elite, Brahminical and powerful section of the society (ibid.).

HISTORY AND POLITICAL ACTION

The histories that are proposed by them are not passive and unconcerned with the people. Unlike the histories written by academic historians, they are active in the memory of the people, full of power to influence Dalits and mobilize them, politically, for making their future. Dalit political forces, who champion Dalit struggle against dominant Brahminical forces have successfully used the historical symbols invented in their electoral and political discourse for the mobilization of various Dalit communties under one banner. The use of Jhalkaribai in the Bundelkhand region and Udadevi in the central region of UP are examples of this use of historical symbols. Jhalkaribai, who was described as a maid servant of Rani Laxmibai in the novel written by B.L. Varma (1951), was picked up by the Dalits and given a larger than life image. They recasted her as their own heroine of the 1857 Rebellion and established her as the symbol of their active role in the freedom struggle (Vidrohi 2004: 79). The history, myth and memory of Jhalkaribai has been used by the BSP in their electoral discourse to mobilize the Dalits for their political empowerment in the Bundelkhand

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

region. A similar phenomenon can be observed in the Lucknow region where the history and memory of Udadevi, a Pasi *virangana* (brave lady) who was a close associate of Begum Hazrat Mahal during the 1857 Rebellion, has been successfully used by the BSP and the Lok Shakti Party (a Dalit party led by Ram Vilas Paswan). In Bihar too, this phenomenon can be observed in the Mokama region of north Bihar, where the myth of Chuharmal is used for identity construction and political mobilization of the Dusadhs (Narayan 2001b).

These are examples of how history assumes relevance and is being used actively for carving out the future of the Dalits. With growing democratization and with the struggle for acquiring power in the country, many more examples of the use of history as an influential discourse for socio-political and cultural empowerment of Dalits may be found. These new histories may prove themselves to be histories of the future and histories for the future of the Dalits, marginalized and subaltern communities in South Asian societies.

In the next few chapters we will see how women heroes that are being studied in this book namely Jhalkaribai, Udadevi and Mahaviridevi, are used by the BSP to mobilize both the Dalit communities to which they originally belonged and the Dalit community at large. Also to be analysed is the process through which the myths and legends around them that centres on the 1857 Rebellion are used for consolidating and asserting a strong Dalit identity and how they also help to build up the image of Mayawati as the bearer of the legacy of these heroes.

Notes

1. Oral interview with Bhullar, Godampatti, Shahabpur, UP, on 23 January 2003.
2. Oral interview of Ram Lakhan Pasi, Pasiyapur, Shahabpur, UP, on 26 January 2003.
3. Same as Note 1.
4. Oral interview with Avinash Choudhry, Kidganj, Allahabad, on 15 May 2004.
5. Recorded at the Baniya Sammelan, Allahabad, 6 October 2005.
6. *Dalit Kesari*, Allahabad, 14–30 June 1990.
7. Sumanshankar, *Himayati*, May 1996 issue.
8. S.L. Bauddh, *Majhi Janata*, 1: 8 November 2001, Kanpur, pp. 3–4.
9. *Asian Age*, Calcutta, 24 and 31 December 1995 and 7 January 1996.
10. *Hindustan*, Lucknow, 18 July 1999.
11. Same as Note 10.
12. Pamphlets published on the occasion of Nishad, Bind, Kashyap, Lodh Ekta Sammelan, 23 February 1997, Allahabad.

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

13. Pamphlets of the Nishad caste published during its conference in demand of its traditional rights on water and sand, 10–11 November 1979.
14. Mayawati's speeches during election rallies collected from newspapers.
15. Analysis of Dalit popular booklets collected by Dalit Resource centre, Allahabad.

Copyright © 2006. SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

Chapter 5

Jhalkaribai and the Koris of Bundelkhand

In a village adjoining Jhansi, a play on the life of Jhalkaribai was being staged. In the play as soon as Jhalkaribai cut off the head of a British soldier, the audience applauded and began shouting 'Jhalkaribai ki Jai' (Hail Jhalkaribai). The village where this took place was a Dalit village predominantly inhabited by the Koris, the caste to which Jhalkaribai belonged.

Field diary, Narayan 2003

In the search for icons and symbols with whom the Dalits of UP could identify, Jhalkaribai has emerged as a significant one. The BSP projects her importantly in its mobilizational campaign, since she is popular in the Bundelkhand region of UP, as a hero of the 1857 Rebellion. It organized many functions and celebrations to commemorate her memory. One such function was organized on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of India's independence in 1997. What is interesting is that while the memory of Jhalkaribai was being celebrated in Bundelkhand and Allahabad, Rani Laxmibai was also honoured as one of the martyrs of 1857. The day was celebrated in some places as 'Gaurav Diwas,' in some as 'Itihas Diwas,' while in still other places the occasion was used for tree plantation.[1] In the celebrations honouring, Laxmibai there was no mention of Jhalkaribai; while in the programmes honouring Jhalkaribai, Laxmibai was either not mentioned or mentioned derogatorily. Both these characters are parts of the same story but they are remembered and honoured separately and in different forms by the communities to which they belonged. The celebrations around Rani Laxmibai were mostly organized by the BJP and the RSS and were largely attended by upper-caste communities, while those around Jhalkaribai were organized by the BSP and attended by lower-caste communities.

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

Copyright © 2006. SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

An interesting point to be noted is that the celebrations around Rani Laxmibai focused on her feminine qualities, which are much admired by upper castes, such as sacrifice, self-effacement, sense of honour and beauty. Even today these qualities are emulated by upper-caste women and looked upon as ideals to be acquired. On the other hand, the qualities of Jhalkaribai, which were projected in glowing terms by the BSP, were masculine, like bravery, chivalry and valour. Rani Laxmibai supposedly had these masculine qualities too. Subhadra Kumari Chauhan wrote, in the poem *Jhansi ki Rani*, '*Khub larhi mardani woh to Jhansi wali rani thi*' (The one who fought bravely like a man was the Queen of Jhansi). But the BJP and the RSS, in their electoral campaigns, removed the masculine traits and replaced them with upper-caste feminine traits of sacrifice and self-effacement. In quite the opposite vein, the BSP eliminated Jhalkaribai's feminine attributes and replaced them with masculine qualities. They highlighted the elements of power that underlay the masculine qualities of aggression and militancy. This became an important reference point for the political mobilization of the Dalits and justified the use of the myth of Jhalkaribai. The attempt was to create memories through celebrations of the 1857 Rebellion which suited the logic of the political forces and the target groups for which they were intended.

HISTORY, MEMORY AND CELEBRATIONS

It was in 1907 that the history of the 1857 Rebellion was rediscovered by a group of nationalist Indian youths living in London. They organized a festival around the memory of the war on 10 May 1907, which they named *Yaadgari Diwas* (Remembrance Day). The idea of the festival crept into their minds as a reaction to British plans of celebrating the 50th anniversary of their victory over the 1857 revolutionaries. The government issued special volumes in memory of eminent army personnel and administrators who had suppressed the Indian rebellion. The revolutionaries were cursed and criticized in the dramas and lectures organized as part of the celebrations.

Veer Savarkar, leader of the Abhinav Bharat Revolutionary Society, was the person who thought of organizing the *Yaadgari Diwas*. He constructed images of heroes and heroines such as Nana Sahib, Maharani Jhansi, Tantya Tope, Kunwar Singh and Maulvi Ahmed Sahib. He developed a nationalist story on the events of 1857 and in 1908, he wrote a history of 1857 in his book, *The Indian War of Independence*, in Marathi,

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

which contested the British version of the same. Savarkar himself defined the motive behind writing such a history in one of his essays: 'The purpose of writing this history was to inspire people with a burning desire to rise again and wage a second and successful war to liberate the motherland' (Savarkar 1909: 5). He also expected history to place before the people a programme of organization and action in order to enable them to prepare for future wars of liberation. To preach such revolutionary gospel throughout India and for it to have conviction, he invoked the memories of the warriors of 1857. His aim in representing this history was to lend legitimacy and symbolic power to the proponents of armed national revolt against foreign domination. At that time the extremist faction of nationalists were denounced as criminal by the moderates. The Indian National Congress (INC) was also critical of armed struggle and was in favour of reforms and a peaceful solution to existing problems. The rediscovery of the history of 1857 was a political move devised by revolutionary Indian freedom fighters to set an ideal for the nationalists, inspire them and acquire legitimacy for their revolutionary political actions.

In 1928, *Kirti*, a journal published by a revolutionary group, focused its April issue on the revolt of 1857. In this issue, Bhagavati Charan Vohra wrote an article called '*10 May Ka Shubh Din*' (Auspicious Day of 10 May)', in which he emphasized that the day marked the beginning of the Indian freedom movement (as quoted in Singh, Jagmohan and Lal, Chaman 1991: 145). This thought was developed by the nationalist historians who viewed the 1857 episode as the first war of Indian independence. Socio-political forces, in the struggle against the British, thus seemed to construct and use history in the form of a story of the past. In this process, history was narrated in an exaggerated manner and it acquired the form of mytho-history.[2] Here, history appeared as a memory of things said and done in the past. In the telling of history, there appeared to be a search for similarities between the past and the present, with the past being depicted in vivid images that easily caught the imagination of the present and thereby arousing the emotions of the people. History is, thus, the reconstruction of the past in terms of the present.

Inventing Histories and Image Making

Nationalist historians and politicians portray Laxmibai as a towering, heroic figure of the 1857 Revolt. The portrayal conformed to the pattern

Copyright © 2006. SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

set by Savarkar for the heroes and heroines of this revolt. This pattern entails building images of valiant martyrs who were imbued with a strong sense of patriotism and were popular leaders of the revolt. Both the Hindu and Muslim sections of the Indian society accepted them to be as such. Jawaharlal Nehru, in his book, *The Discovery of India*, further developed a similar image of Rani Laxmibai. Littérateurs like B.L. Verma and Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, elaborated this pattern in their novels and poetry. Pandit Sunderlal also narrated the stories of the heroes of the 1857 revolt in his book *Bharat Ka Swatantrata Sangram*, which became very popular with freedom fighters and other educated nationalists who were concerned about the freedom of the country. This pattern of image making of national heroes was also followed in the print media and in government publications like *Amar Chitra Katha*s, popular calendars and drama (*nautanki*) booklets that were transmitted to the people in colonial and post-colonial India. History text books that were prescribed in schools, after independence, also employed the same pattern of projecting the historical narrative of 1857.

*Nautanki*s or musical theatre, which were extremely popular among the masses for their loud music, flashy costumes and melodramatic elements, also helped to spread the message of nationalism through stories about nationalist heroes and events of that period. Many of these *nautanki*s were composed and performed in the rural Hindi region, which not only helped to make the people aware of the 1857 freedom struggle but also raised consciousness with regard to the social vices prevailing in society. In Kanpur, the most popular *nautanki*s of that period were *Balia Ka Sher* and *Veer Balak* whose hero was Chittu Pandey. These were composed by Krishna Pahalwan and were based on the events that took place in Balia. In Lucknow, Kukkuji (another playwright) wrote another play on the Balia incident. In Kanpur, Aligarh and Hathras, the plays that were popular were *Jhansi Ki Rani*, *Zulm Ki Aag*, *Subhash Chandra Bose*, *Veer Jawahar* and *Netaji Urf Bangal Ka Sher*. *Nautanki*s that were based on important events that took place during the period, like the Jallianwalabagh massacre, and those that were about legendary nationalist heroes like Shaheed Bhagat Singh and Rani Laxmibai, also helped to develop a narrative of nationalism in the grass roots.[3]

It is not easy, however, as to find such mythical and legendary narratives about Laxmibai in the serious critical histories about the revolt of 1857 as in the nationalist mythical narratives (Stokes 1978; Mukherjee 2001). The nationalist narratives reveal a meta-history centred on the glorification of a hero. There were, however, no references to the role of Dalits in

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

this movement. Realising this gross omission from the pages of history, the Dalits began to write their own story of the revolt of 1857 after 1960. In their narratives of history, as described in Chapter 4, many Dalit heroes and heroines, like Jhalkaribai, Udadevi, Matadeen Bhangi, Chetram Jatav, Balluram Mehtar, Banke Chamar and Veera Pasi, were invented and projected as legendery figures who were more dedicated and patriotic than the established figures, such as Laxmibai and Kunwar Singh. It is, however, interesting to note that the Dalit narratives are not very different from the nationalist ones, with regard to image making and mode of description of heroes and heroines.

Myth, Memory and Story

The myth of Jhalkaribai, as narrated by the Dalits, is located within the narrative of 1857, in the 'war of Indian independence.' The myth is narrated as follows:

> There was a *dasi* (maid servant) named Jhalkaribai in the palace of Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi. She was a low-caste woman. When the British besieged the fort of Jhansi and started firing from all sides, Jhalkaribai suggested that the Rani should leave the place after securing her child (who was the heir apparent) to her back. She, on her part, would hoodwink the British by assuming the appearance of the Rani. The Rani accepted this advice and made good her escape with the child. The ruse worked and for a long time the British were uncertain about the true identity of Jhalkaribai who was posing as Rani Jhansi. It was much later that they learnt that the 'Rani' was in fact the maid Jhalkaribai. But by then it was too late and the Rani had already covered a considerable distance. (Vidrohi 2004: 56)

The myth is a part of the popular memory of the people of Bundelkhand region and is narrated in several versions. It has still survived in people's memory and it often resurfaces in folklores, folk stories and discussions at the village squares (*chaupal*). Most of the Dalit communities believe that Jhalkaribai was an incarnation of a goddess who had descended upon earth to serve the country. In the words of Raj Kumar Koree, a singer in the *Jababi Kirtan Mandali*, '*U to durga rahin*' (She was Goddess Durga). *Jababi Kirtan* is a popular cultural performance in this region and the story of Jhalkaribai and her brave deeds is a common subject of most *Kirtan mandali*s (devotional song groups). An example of one such *kirtan* is the following:

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

Jai Jhalkari Durga, Kali
Jai, Jai Ma
Angrezon ka garba tune
chur, chur kiya.

(Translated)

(Hail Jhalkari Durga, Kali
Hail, Hail Mother
The pride of the British
You shattered to smithereens.)

In an interview, Raj Kumar Koree informed that this *kirtan* was a recent composition in retaliation to the *Jababi Kirtan* on Laxmibai performed by the Suresh Singh Bundela Kirtan Party.[4]

Jhalkaribai was a real historical character and not a myth; but the memories about her vary between different communities. They are in a continuous process of reconstruction and modification, especially among the lower castes. This is so because it helps these communities to revise their identity and juxtapose it against that of the other communities. Contesting images of Jhalkaribai are still being circulated in the Bundelkhand region, and it has also become a theme of political and social contention. This can be illustrated from the fact that in Kachnara village in the Hamirpur district of Bundelkhand, the old and illiterate Ram Narayan Shukul, a Brahmin, subverts Raj Kumar Koree's version by saying that 'Jhalkaribai *koi khas nahi thi*' (Jhalkaribai was not very important). She was just a *Korin* and a maid servant of Rani Laxmibai. The two resembled each other physically. When the Rani came out of the fort with her army to face the British, Jhalkaribai dressed herself as the Rani and confused the British about her true identity.[5]

Addressing Jhalkaribai as a *Korin* reflects an upper-caste apathy and neglect, as the Chamars, Doms and Bhangis and Koris have traditionally occupied the lowest position in the social hierarchy of Bundelkhand and are often used as derogatory terms of address. Kori is an untouchable Hindu caste whose caste-based occupation is weaving. Although people of this caste are distributed throughout the state, it is mainly concentrated in Bundelkhand, Ruhelkhand and other parts of central UP. Their total population was 1,381, 588 according to the 1981 Census. Kori appears to be a purely functional group made up of caste members who were either expelled from their own communities or who left on their own accord.

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

The word 'Kori' is derived from *kora*, which means 'coarse cloth,' and, therefore, refers to their occupation of weaving. Weaving has been the traditional occupation of this group but they are also engaged in agriculture. Besides, some are also engaged in skilled and unskilled labour and are employed in different government and private services. They call themselves by many names such as Koli, Kamal, Kamalvansi, Dhiman, Aharwar and Sankhawar. In some parts of Ruhelkhand they also call themselves Gupta (Prasad 1995: 23). Today, the Koris, like other Dalit castes, use the myth of Jhalkaribai for the glorification of their community. They also celebrate *Jhalkaribai Jayanti* each year to enhance their self-respect and elevate the status of their caste. It is a matter of great pride that she was a *Dalit Virangana* (brave woman warrior) born in the Kori caste and they highlight this dimension while recounting her brave deeds.

History of the Making of the Story

In the written historical record of that period, such as the diary of General Rose (leader of the British troops which attacked the Jhansi fort) and the gazetteer of the period, one finds no reference to Jhalkaribai. One can, however, find a mention of her in the book, *Majha Pravas*, written by Vishnu Rao Godse, who refers to her as 'Jhalkari Korin.' *Majha Pravas* is a travelogue based on the author's travels in the central part of India during the 1857 Rebellion. In the book she is mentioned to be a maid of Rani Laxmibai (Godse 1907).

Another reference to her myth can be found in 'Jhansi Ki Rani,' written by the eminent littérateur, B.L. Varma (1951: 255). He created a substory in his novel based on Jhalkaribai for which he interviewed Jhalkaribai's grandson. A detailed version of Jhalkaribai is presented here. Varma himself belonged to the Bundelkhand region. While depicting her character, he too addresses her as a *Korin* who reembled Laxmibai. He narrates the story as follows:

> There was a Jhalkari Korin. Her features, the contours of her nose, the colour of her eyes, her complexion and physical stature all resembled those of the Rani. The Rani liked her very much. Her husband's name was Puran Koree. She was not Laxmibai's servant but someone who was very close to her. She learnt archery, wrestling and shooting from the Rani and, later, became a member of the female army created by the Rani. Jhalkari inspired her husband to fight and die for the Rani and the country. Subsequently, he became a *topchee* (cannon operator) posted at the main gate of the fort. When Laxmibai proceeded to fight

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

the British, the British began to chase her. Jhalkari, dressed as the Rani, approached the British commander, General Rose, who mistook her for the Rani and arrested her. Laxmibai was thus saved from being captured. The confusion continued for a week and it was only after it was revealed that Jhalkaribai was not the Rani that she was released. (Varma 1951)

In this text, Jhalkari is always addressed as a *Korin* and as an ordinary soldier in the army of the Rani; her name is not suffixed with *bai*. Other women soldiers of the army, namely, Moteebai, Mundari and Sundari, are accorded greater significance, although their rank was equal to that of Jhalkaribai's. In 1951, Ram Chandra Heran, a progressive writer in the Bundeli language, wrote a novel called *Maati*. This novel was not centred on Jhalkaribai but it gave a small narrative about her in which she was depicted as a chivalrous and a valiant martyr (Heran 1951).

The first biography of Jhalkaribai was written in 1964 by Bhawani Shankar Visharad, a Dalit intellectual. He picked up the story of Jhalkaribai from Varma's novel and, with the help of the oral narratives of the lower-caste people living in Nayapurva in the vicinity of Jhansi fort, reconstructed it. Visharad wrote:

> When I was a student of B.A. in Kanpur, I heard about Jhalkari. I developed the ambition to write a few words on her. In December 1961, I was transferred to Jhansi and after that I started working on the ambitious project that I had entertained for so long. First, I consulted various books. But the books were not sufficient to quench my thirst. I then decided to discover it for myself. So, I went to Nayapurva many times. Being on outsider, I had to wander through various lanes without achieving anything. But this did not deter me from my inner desire to explore the hidden materials about Jhalkaribai, instead my ambition was further whetted.
>
> Meanwhile, I happened to meet a social worker by the name of Nathu Ram Aarya. My perseverence and dedication stirred up his emotions and he extended his cooperation to me. As a first step, he narrated to me all that he had heard about Jhalkari from his maternal grandmother. Thereafter, I was accompanied by him to Nayapurva, again, where I met the residents of that area. We were successful in locating the place where Puran and his wife, Jhalkari, lived. We reached the place now known as Jhalkari Burj where they had been posted as cannon operators. We also saw other adjacent places.
>
> Then we met Mohan, a tailor master, who on being impressed by our efforts, took us to the office of Veerangana Jhalkaribai Samiti located at Manik Chowk, Jhansi. We succeeded in collecting some materials from there on the

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

courtesy of Sri Damodar, a lawyer by profession. But I had the desire to look more deeply into the life history of Jhalkari. Meanwhile, the monsoon season came. With one Aryaji, we reached Anjani Toria, where Jhalkari used to practice shooting. While returning in the evening, we encountered a very old man who cast some light on the life of Jhalkari. After that, I again went to Nayapurva when, fortunately, we met a very old woman named Mannobai who belonged to the same *gotra* to which Jhalkari belonged. She narrated to me all that she had heard from her mother-in-law. With the help of Mannobai, we met Jugatreebai, the oldest lady in the area. She explained, in great detail, the problems which Puran had to face during the mutiny. Further information was provided to us by Sri Arjun Lal Richaria (former Chairman of the Veerangana Memorial Trust). He and Suraj Bhan gave us much information about Jhalkari. (Visharad 1964: 3)

Bhawani Shankar Visharad presented an image of Jhalkaribai which was as follows:

Jhalkari was a childless lady. Whatever she did, she did it for future generations, for society, and for the belief in the Bhagwad Geeta preaching that 'Action is thy concern, not reward.' She gave priority to action and fulfilled her duty without any ambition for reward. She provided one of the finest examples of what is the duty of a woman towards a woman. Without caring for herself and putting herself in the jaws of death, she succeeded in getting the queen to move out of the fort safely. Thus, she provided another opportunity to the Rani for playing a role in the revolt of 1857. She set an example by breaking out of the confinements of the four walls and the *purdah* for women, and taught them the lessons of their larger role in history and society.

Further, Jhalkari raised the heads and shoulders of those living in acute poverty and, yet had sacrificed their blood for laying down the foundation of freedom. A female, who had no respectable source of livelihood and no one to share her burden, awakened the slumbering soils, gave them encouragement and placed the community of women on a high pedestal. (ibid.: 33)

Since 1990 several booklets, dramas and songs have been composed by Dalit activists, politicians and writers, narrating the story of Jhalkaribai. Efforts have been made to rewrite and reread the story of Jhalkaribai with the avowed objective of placing her on an equal footing with Laxmibai. This can be seen from the following lines which have been written by Archana Verma (1997):

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

Macha Jhansi mein ghamasan, chahunaur machee kilkari thee,
Angrezon se loha lenein, ran mein kudee Jhalkari thee.

(Translated)

(Amidst the sound and fury of battle at Jhansi
Plunged Jhalkari to confront the British.)

These lines were an attempt to upstage Subhadra Kumari Chauhan's famous poem on Rani Laxmibai, which is well known and frequently recited. Sham Lal Baudh (2001) while narrating the untold story of the freedom movement in *Jhalkaribai Va Puran Kori* also subverts Subhadra Kumari Chauhan's projection of Laxmibai. Chauhan says in her poem:

Khub larhi mardani woh to jhansi wali rani thi.
Bundele harbolon ke mooh hamne suni kahani thi

(Translated)

(The one who fought bravely like a man was the Queen of Jhansi.
We heard this story from the mouths of the narrators of Bundelkhand)

These lines say that the glory of Rani Jhansi was narrated through songs by the people of Bundelkhand, who said that she fought like a man against the British. But, according to Baudh, the one who actually fought against the British was not Rani Laxmibai but Jhalkaribai Kori, who will always be immortalized in memory and history as a Dalit *virangana* (brave female warrior) (ibid.).

Many other Dalit writers and composers have narrated the myth of Jhalkaribai, glorifying her brave deeds. Bihari Lal Harit composed a folk ballad in 1995, called *Virangana Jhalkari*. Earlier in 1990, Mata Prasad, (then the governor of Arunachal Pradesh) composed a drama on her called *Jhalkaribai Natak*. It can, therefore, be seen that these writings further corroborate the argument that it is the reconstruction of history that is the driving objective of the depressed castes. Two important features of this process are clearly visible. First, literature is reinterpreted and recreated to reconstruct the identity of the depressed castes; and second, literature is made the entry point of a grand history, which the lower castes propose to write. Thus castes, communities and groups, while exploring their identity,

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

reinvent and reimagine myths, memories and the past. This is the space in which contesting political forces enter the arena of interpreting the past.

The storyline of Mata Prasad's drama (1990) on Jhalkaribai was as follows:

> Jhalkaribai was the wife of Puran Kori. The Koree *jat* (caste) had participated in the war against the British along with Laxmibai. The main gate of the palace, where Jhalkaribai's husband was posted, was guarded by soldiers of the Kori caste. Jhalkaribai was as courageous as Laxmibai and was her closest friend on account of which the upper-caste employees in the palace despised her and conspired against her. Jhalkaribai was an expert at wrestling and other physical exercises. She was trained by the Rani herself in horse-riding and shooting and was the chief of the Durgavahini, a women's battalion of the Rani's army. It was Jhalkaribai who advised the Rani to go out of the fort with her adopted son, Damodar, and conceived the plan of confusing the British. As a consequence, without caring for her life, she went up to Dantia fighting bravely against the British army. But, here, she was arrested and imprisoned for a long time till she was subsequently released.

In this narrative, Jhalkaribai was placed on the same pedastal as Rani Laxmibai. Both of them excelled in martial arts, the only difference being that Laxmibai was a queen and Jhalkaribai a *Korin*. According to this version, Jhalkaribai was treated by the Rani as her *bahin* (sister) and the Rani's military strategies were planned by her. It was on account of Jhalkaribai's friendship with Laxmibai that the conspiracies of the upper castes could not concretize. She was eventually arrested because of the treachery of Thakur Dulhaju. In this version, she is projected as a patriot greater than any person belonging to a higher caste (ibid.).

The upper stratum of society finds such an interpretation unacceptable because, on the one hand, Jhalkaribai is depicted as an equally significant strategist as Laxmibai while, on the other hand, a Thakur is characterized as a traitor. Here a depressed caste is, by the logic of facts, represented as being more patriotic. Not a single low-caste member, in this version, is shown to be a traitor.

Most of the Dalit writers have recovered the forgotten and almost unknown story of Jhalkaribai from the writings of B.L. Varma, a non-Dalit novelist. It was through his novel that the story of Jhalkaribai disseminated among the literate and educated people. Bhawani Shankar Visharad in the biography of Jhalkaribai repeatedly referred to Varma's description.

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

This new information was disseminated in the form of biography, drama and poetry, which were composed by Dalit writers. The dissemination of the story of Jhalkaribai has a powerful ideological motivation—a new form of awareness and a new attempt at defining identity and aspirations. One of the basic purposes of this kind of recovery of the past is to acquire legitimacy and a reconstructed identity in the new socio-political and cultural context.

MARTYRDOM AND DALIT NARRATIVES

Heroic narratives among traditional groups are intended to praise the hero/heroes and his/their achievements and thereby strengthening the morale and corporate pride of the group. The narratives need not be limited to historical elements, but may draw on mythology, religion or may even be pure fiction. Heroic narratives constitute the collective memory of the group and serve to direct and give focus to the loyalties of its members and encourage them to struggle for their newly carved identity. In modern literate societies, these heroic narratives appear as secondary narratives, which are more contrived, more literary and composed in an advanced state of civilization.

D.C. Dinkar (1990: 24–25) presents a very interesting story about Jhalkaribai. According to him, 'Rani Laxmibai had a lust for the crown. She was not interested in revolting against the British. Jhalkaribai stopped her from compomising with them. In fact she was the person who inspired the Rani to fight and struggle for freedom.' He further says:

> It would be unhistorical to remember Rani Laxmibai as a martyr in the freedom movement. Many historians make attempts to establish that Rani Laxmibai was killed on 16th June 1858 while fighting with the British. But in reality, the Rani escaped the colonial army with the help of the Maharaja of Pratapgarh, entered into the dense forest of Nepal Tarai and went underground. In fact, she lived a long life and died at the age of 80.

He also provides a picture of Rani Laxmibai which was printed in *Sudha* (a reputed Hindi Journal) in May 1941. This shows that in the manner of projecting the image of Jhalkaribai, there is also a tendency to distort the earlier image of Laxmibai as a martyr of the nation and the concept of her heroic death, which remains in the mainstream story of the Indian freedom movement.

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

Thus, on the one hand, there is an attempt to delete the narrative of martyrdom, which is associated with the popular image of Laxmibai. On the other hand, there is the glorification of the martyrdom of Jhalkaribai by various Dalit organizations. Recently Bharat Ratna Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar Janm Diwas Mela Aayojan Samiti, Allahabad, celebrated the 143rd 'Shahid Diwas' (Martyr Day) of Jhalkaribai in Allahabad. On this occasion, the narrative strategy of most of the speakers was based on three points:

(*i*) the projection of a nationalist dedication and heroism,
(*ii*) the weaving of the narrative about Jhalkaribai's heroic death and
(*iii*) the glorification of her martyrdom.

Dalit writers also construct the martyr-ology of Dalit freedom fighters in the 1857 Rebellion. In this martyr-ology, Jhalkaribai and Udadevi are glorified as significant contributors to Dalit heritage of dedication and patriotism. Through these narratives, the Dalits attempt to highlight their role in the freedom movement. Another purpose of the construction of a martyr-ology is to stiffen the endurance of survivors and induce courage and confidence in them. Martyrdom has been considered to be a supreme dedication for the nation. It symbolizes patriotism, which forms the basis of emotional nationalism. In both colonial and post-colonial nationalist literature, martyrdom has been highly glorified. Ramdhari Singh Dinkar's famous poem *Pranati*, reflects this trend:

Kalam aaj unki jai bol
jala asthian bari bari
chhitkai jinne chingaari
jo charh gaye punya vedi par
liye bin gardan ka mol
kalam aaj unki jai bol
(As quoted in Kumar 1994: 5–15)

(Translated)

(My pen today is honouring them
Those who set their bones on fire
That ignited a bright spark
Those warriors who gave up their lives
Without demanding any price for them
My pen today is honouring them)

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

The trend of glorifying and valorizing martyrdom as a supreme sacrifice for the nation percolates down to the common people, making it a part of their popular imagination. Khare (1984) argues that certain segments of the untouchable society possess a well-developed self-awareness and are in the process of constructing new ideologies to support the kinds of action necessary to empower themselves.

Table 5.1 gives a chronological list of the books that have been written featuring the history of Jhalkaribai.

Table 5.1
Published books that feature the history of Jhalkaribai

Author	*Title of the Book*	*Date*
Vishnu Rao Godse	Majha Pravas	1907
Brindavan Lal Varma	Jhansi Ki Rani	1951
Ram Chandra Heran	Maati	1951
Bhawani Shankar Visharad	Veerangana Jhalkaribai	1964
Piyush	Jhansi Ki Rani Natak	1972
D.C. Dinkar	Swatantra Sangram Mein Achhuton Ki Yogdan	1990
Chokhe Lal Verma	Jhalkaribai Natak	1990
Mata Prasad	Veerangana Jhalkaribai Kavya	1993
Bihari Lal Harit	Veerangana Jhalkari	1995

It is not easy to find out whether the story of Jhalkaribai originated in the oral culture or in the print culture. In fact, oral and literary cultures exist side by side and mutually influence each other. Hofmayer (1993) emphasized that oral and literary cultures in colonial and post-colonial societies exist within unified social situations and are mutually interactive. The memory of Jhalkari, as prevalent today amongst the depressed castes, has been revived after much modification and manipulation. Brindavan Lal Varma made an effort to depict Jhalkaribai as she had existed in the memory of these castes before 1950. That it has undergone many modifications is evident from the writings of Ramchandra Heran between 1950 and 1960. Varma depicted her as courageous, chivalrous and a favourite of the Rani, but not as superior to Laxmibai in diplomatic or military skills. In the literature of the 1950s, however, Jhalkaribai's closeness to Laxmibai is attributed more to her abilities and competence. The jealousies of the higher castes too have been exaggerated in an artistic but vitriolic manner. Among the dramatists, writers and dance groups, this articulation acquired a new dimension and amplification in the 1960s. In the plays performed by groups having a larger number of low-caste artists, Jhalkaribai was projected as being equivalent to Laxmibai. This might have been because

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

they worked under a strategy instrumentalized by the depressed castes to reconstruct their history, which was to establish equivalence between heroes of the lower castes and those of the higher castes.

Many other factors also played significant roles in the formation of a Dalit identity and the forging of a new consciousness. Communist parties, which had a strong following in Bundelkhand, in eastern Uttar Pradesh, in the 1950s and 1960s, perceived a potential among the lower castes to conduct a revolutionary transformation in society. With the idea of inculcating self-confidence among the lower castes, they used cultural tools that highlighted the role of the lower castes in the making of nation and society. Popular leadership of the communist parties emerged from cultural groups such as popular theatre and revolutionary choral groups (*geet mandali*). The scripts composed by these groups had subplots based on lower-caste heroes, in conjunction with the established mainstream heroes of the nationalist movement. This trend created the space for the Dalits to magnify these subplots into main themes that could be used in future for identity construction. Support from political forces provided the lower castes with an even greater propelling power for engineering their identity in an assertive manner.

During the 1970s, many low-priced texts of plays on Laxmibai were published in Kolkata. To make these plays more attractive, romantic, and accessible, surrogate characters were highlighted. Frequent performance of these plays helped in the construction of a new memory among the Dalits. Conversely, the reactions of the people were collected by the writers and incorporated into these plays. This further helped in the construction of narratives, bringing out the identity of the lower castes in new contexts.

Commemoration of Memory and Legend

The Dalits of Bundelkhand also invented feasts, fasts, celebrations and commemoration around the legend of Jhalkaribai. They organized a function every year at Jhansi in the Fort of Rani Laxmibai to commemorate the memory of Jhalkaribai. A tower near Unnao Gate and Anjani Toria is named after Jhalkaribai. The Dalits of Jhansi have instituted a Polytechnic Institute in her memory. They have also created a Veerangana Memorial Trust to ensure the transmission of the story of Jhalkaribai. The BSP organizes the Veerangana Jhalkaribai Mahotsav every year at the block and district levels in the Bundelkhand region. The Dalit community has

Copyright © 2006. SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

constructed a grand statue of Jhalkaribai near the fort, which was inaugurated by Mayawati when she was the chief minister of UP.

The politics of celebrating historical legends is revealed by the fact that while the BSP commemorates the myth of Jhalkaribai, the BJP celebrates the memory of Laxmibai in various ways to mobilize its own mass base. The women's wing of the BJP has a special branch of activists named 'Laxmibai Shakha.' They celebrate Laxmibai Jayanti every year, when they sing songs and narrate stories and poems glorifying the brave deeds of the queen. Through these means, they attempt to transmit the ideals of Rani Laxmibai, like patriotism, femininity, loyalty towards the husband, religiosity (*deshbhakti*, *satitva*, *patrivrata and dharamparayanta*), which suit the party's ideology. During the BJP regime, the Ministry of Human Resource Development instituted an award in the memory of Laxmibai and Sati Anusuya (another legendary, ideal Hindu married woman). The BJP also organizes Maharani Laxmibai Jayanti every year, in the eastern and central part of UP. The Rashtriya Sewika Samiti, Kashi (a women's non-political organization influenced by the RSS ideology), also celebrates, the birthdays of historical figures like Jijabai, Laxmibai and

Figure 5.1
Facsimile of postage stamp depicting Jhalkaribai

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

Ahilyabai every year. In these celebrations, however, one can find no mention of Jhalkaribai, which makes the Dalits believe that there is a deliberate effort to suppress their historical role in these narratives and celebrations.

The myth of Jhalkaribai is not utilized only by the Dalits. The recent movement demanding a separate Bundelkhand state has also used the myth of Jhalkaribai in order to give colour and prestige to its political language. The Bundeli identity, which is the essence of the movement, politically relates itself with the myth of Jhalkaribai to win the support of the Dalits and the women of the area. This move can be interpreted as a political imperative of mobilization on a larger scale. The Government of India's Post and Telegraph Department also issued a postal stamp depicting Jhalkaribai (Figure 5.1), to satisfy the Dalit urge to construct their identity. Here also the myth of Jhalkaribai has acquired a political dimension and her image is being reconstructed in accordance with the demands of the social situation.

Politics of Myth

When the BSP was launched, being aware of the historical backwardness of Dalit caste consciousness, Kanshi Ram initially used personalities like Ambedkar, Shahuji Maharaj and Periyar to build the identity of the Dalits. This effort however met with little success, perhaps because an organic link between the middle-class intellectuals of the BSP and the members of communities living on the fringes of society was absent and that a sense of history was lacking among them. The BSP thus decided that the linkage between these personalities alone would not meet with popular receptivity. The strategy adopted for regions such as Bundelkhand, where the demographic balance was in favour of SCs, was to employ the myths of legendary Dalit historical figures. The character identified for this purpose was Jhalkaribai, who had a hegemonic presence in collective memory, so that an organic solidarity could emanate horizontally between the members of the community, and vertically with the elite of the community. Shivcharan Prajapati was the BSP candidate in charge of this task in the run-up to the 1996 election in UP.

In traditional theories of myth, the historical hero is paralleled with the mythical hero (Eliade 1989: 55). Here also a parallelism was devised between Prajapati and the valiant woman of the past, namely Jhalkaribai, in the manner in Table 5.2.

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

Table 5.2
A comparison between Jhalkaribai and Shivcharan Prajapati

Jhalkaribai	*Shivcharan Prajapati*
1. Dasi	Poor
2. Member of depressed caste (Kori)	Member of depressed caste (Kumhar)
3. Fought against the British	Fighting against the oppressive, hegemonic Brahminical order

The BSP infused Jhalkaribai with many mythical attributes that were aimed at revising the historical consciousness of the depressed communities. A question pertinent to this new scenario is how the BSP thought of and adopted this new strategy to mobilize the SCs and elicit a positive response from the allied sections of Indian society. The space for such an operational design was provided by historiography as it developed during the colonial time. Historiography was given a vertical framework and thus gradually became elitist. On account of its indifference towards the horizontal framework, we find Indian historiography lacking in multiple substantial facts. Three main schools that developed after 1857 were the Colonial School, the Nationalist School and the Marxist School. Colonial history writing is represented by Malleson and Kye in *History of the Sepoy War in India* and by P.B. Minturn in *From New Europe to Delhi*. According to Malleson, the failure of the revolt of 1857 was due to the moral lassitude of the Indians and conversely the moral rectitude of the British. The British were able to crush the revolt on account of their superior ethics. The significance of the mutiny of 1857 underwent serious modifications in the writings of nationalist historians, such as R.C. Majumdar and in the specialist monograph of Eric Stokes. In them we find the history of *zamindar*s, kings and *taluqdar*s along with an exalted narration of the role of the sepoys in the mutiny. Historians of the Marxist school like R.P. Dutt primarily view the scenario as being immature due to the lack of industrialization and its consequent class formation and birth of class consciousness. Even Marx sees the mutiny as an act of 'peasants in uniform.' Thus the voices of the people at the base of the pyramid went unheard, or were neglected (Guha 1993).

With the development of subaltern historiography, attempts were made to capture the layers beneath the surface. But in a heterogeneous society like India's, these layers were too many to be captured. This was one of the major factors behind the neglect and alienation of the oppressed castes; their aspiration to find a place in history remained unheard. Jyotiba Phule, Ambedkar and others were aware of this but lacked a strategy to remedy

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

the situation. The BSP, however, has been successful in initiating this task, although it is difficult to predict if it will be smooth sailing due to the hidden counterpoising elements in the society. In the absence of history, the mythicization of personalities, the invention of a counter-history and the dependence upon memory became easier and more rewarding as was visible in the UP Assembly election of 1996.

Among the five planning divisions of UP, the Bundelkhand region has the largest SC population (80.6 per cent) whereas Uttarakhand has only 18 per cent (Prasad 1995). Before the 1996 election, the BSP had an alliance with the SP, which has deep roots in the Yadav community (12 per cent) and the Muslims (20 per cent) and had 67 seats in the UP Assembly. After its disenchantment with the SP, it formed an alliance with the Congress, which had lost its base in the state. Despite breaking away from the SP, the BSP retained all of its Assembly seats in 1996. Interestingly, in the Bundekhand region it won 47.61 per cent of the seats whereas the percentage in Uttarakhand was nil. In other regions, its performance varied in accordance with the percentage of the SC population. Second, as is the view of many upper-caste respondents, while parties like the BJP, the SP and the Congress spent huge amounts on exhibitions, banners and other modes of election publicity, the BSP spent the minimum amount and yet captured the majority of the votes. We can thus conclude that the memory of Jhalkaribai was an important determining factor. The efforts of the BSP, towards the glorification and mythification of Jhalkaribai in a reconstructed framework, can also be perceived as the politicization of an already existing memory to meet the political ends of the party. To accomplish this three modes of articulation were implemented:

(*i*) *Orality:* The political ends are communicated orally, a mode popular in the region and practiced from very early times.
(*ii*) *Visualization:* Plays, pamphlets and other kinds of literature that sketch out the caste's identity, are circulated amongst the people of the region. The statue of Jhalkaribai in Jhansi, built under BSP patronage during the regime of Mayawati, is made to resemble Rani Laxmibai, but in a much larger size.
(*iii*) *Ritualism:* Ritualism is observable in the organization of festivals and functions around the personality of Jhalkaribai. Such a commemoration has been a repeated instance in the past.

It is noteworthy that Jhalkaribai was brought into historical memory by an upper-caste littérateur, namely B.L. Varma, but contemporary

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

constructions of her myth are a reaction against the earlier representations. These representations now have a greater presence in the memory of the people, but these have been tailored according to the demands of political interest. In order to ensure the permanence of the memory of Jhalkaribai, many alluring features have been added to her personality. Authority depends upon legitimacy, and legitimacy in turn, depends on mass support. This support is elicited through the recon-struction and invocation of the past. Repetitive invocations add fixity to memory and for this both old and modern media channels are being used.

Notes

1. *Hindustan*, September 1998.
2. For further details on the concept of mytho-history, see Lewis 1967.
3. See U.K. Thapliyal (2005).
4. Interview with Raj Kumar Koree, recorded in Jhansi on 25 October 1998.
5. Recorded in Kachanara village, Hamirpur district, UP. This reflects the upper-castes psyche of denial of the role of the lower castes.

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

Chapter 6

Pasis, Dalits and Udadevi

It happened long ago. There were five Pasis. All five were very brave but they were always quarrelling with each other. But when they got together they shook the throne of Lord Indra. So it is imperative to evoke the collective memory of the Pasis and unite them. The Pasis have their own history of struggle and have their own heroes. What is needed is to present these heroes and histories in our political discourse when we go to mobilize the community.

Indrajit Saroj, General Secretary, BSP, at a lecture delivered at a conference of the local unit of BSP in Allahabad on 5 August 2005

As described in previous chapters, the Dalit women heroes of the 1857 Rebellion have become the symbols of Dalit assertion and pride. They have become the icons of the castes to which they belong, and it has become a political compulsion of various political parties, especially the BSP, to use their myths to politically mobilize the members of these castes. In Dalit political discourse, myths of different castes are also being used to consolidate all the Dalit castes and create a homogenous metanarrative. One such legendary character who is claimed to have played a significant role in the 1857 Rebellion alongside Begum Hazrat Mahal in the Lucknow region and who has become the icon of the Pasi community, but whose aura encompasses all the Dalit castes, is Udadevi. Among the various heroes of the 1857 Rebellion, she is one hero who has been taken over by the BSP to develop the image of Mayawati, who is claimed to be her incarnation. This message was put across to the people by putting up cut outs, posters and hoardings showing Udadevi standing beside Mayawati, at roadside crossings and important sites, just before the 2004 parliamentary elections.[1] The story of her brave deeds and heroic achievements during the 1857 Rebellion were narrated by

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

different BSP leaders at election rallies in various places around Lucknow where her myth was popular, so as to highlight the glorious history of the Dalits. While these stories were narrated mainly at rallies that were held in Pasi hamlets to arouse the caste identity of the Pasis, they were also narrated during rallies held collectively for all the Dalit castes in a particular regions adjoining Lucknow.[2] This chapter will examine the story of Udadevi and study how she has been transformed into an icon for Dalit assertion that is being used by the BSP for the political mobilization of the Dalits.

TELLING AND RETELLING THE MYTH OF UDADEVI

Nobody knows how true the story of Udadevi is. Contemporary sources do not reveal much about her. Academic histories belonging to her period give no sufficient reference or accounts of her. But the Dalits celebrate festivals in her memory; they have installed statues of her at various places in Uttar Pradesh; a fair is organized every year in Sikandarbag, Lucknow. Even political organizations have cropped up in her name. Yet, nobody can say with certainty whether the accounts of Udadevi are a part of the actual or the discursive past of the Dalits. Has she (or her story) become a part of the everyday present of the Dalits or is she a mere a political presentation? Is she a part of their present attempts to capture power through the constructed story of their nationalist past? It appears that the Dalits use Udadevi and her story in many ways, but the significance lies in the telling, writing and celebration of Udadevi. The story may simply be an attempt at a mythical reconstruction of the past governed by the present needs of communities. The needs may be imagined or real, national or not, but the story that is created is a historical narrative to suit the Dalit desires and expectations. The expectations in this case may be interlocked with the emerging aspirations of self-respect and identity formation among the Dalit castes.

Not only is a story transmitted from the older generation grandfather to the younger generation; many a times the reverse happens too. Certain stories are transmitted from the young to the old, and it is this parameter that is explored here to explain the transmission of the 'story of glory' (*gaurava gatha*), a parameter that has become common and popular among the lower castes. Rakesh Chaudhury, a youth of twenty-two years, from the Dalmau village near Rae Bareli, narrated the '*Pasi Gaurav Gatha*'

Copyright © 2006. SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

to me during my fieldwork in August 1998.[3] He told me that the Pasi caste originated out of the sweat of the great saint Parsurama. In the medieval period, many ruling dynasties of central UP were from the Pasi caste; and many brave Pasi men attained martyrdom during the 1857 Rebellion. He also narrated the story of *Virangana* (courageous lady) Udadevi, who was shot dead by the British during the 1857 Revolt. Shakuni Chaudhury, eighty years and the grandfather of Rakesh Chaudhury, on the other hand, glorified the history of the Pasi caste by narrating a story centred on the relationship of the Pasis with Parshurama, that is, about the lineage of the Pasi caste. Neither was he aware about Udadevi nor was he able to narrate stories of Pasi heroes in the 'War of Independence.'[4] Here, persons of two different generations have different narratives glorifying the Pasis. Although there is a difference in the tone and tune of the stories they narrated, the commonality lay in pointing out Pasi relations with saint Parshurama and stories of their royal lineage.

The question here is whether the stories of caste glory were transmitted from grandfather to grandson or from grandson to grandfather? Although it is very difficult to say accurately, it appears, from the narratives of colonial ethnographers (cf. Crooke 1896, who collected many stories about the origin of the Pasis, which project them as being a martial and ruling community), that the transmission is from the mouth of the grandfather to his grandson. This is because the stories that were being transmitted by oral tradition and popular culture were collected by colonial ethnographers and then published in the census, the gazetteers and government publications. Prior to them being recorded in the form of writing, these stories were in a fluid form, which was susceptible to multiple additions and deletions by the narrators and various interpretations. After being recorded and presented in the census, the gazetteers and colonial government publications, these texts became frozen and appeared as 'historical fact.' Thus, transmitted from oral tradition to the written world, they are once again circulated in the oral tradition of contemporary times as historical facts proposed by the Dalits themselves. In the oral tradition, these stories may have had metaphorical and folkloristic structures, but after being documented in the written form, they appeared as authentic textual facts. Some of these stories now appear as important sources of Dalit identity narratives. These documented and published stories are once again circulated in the oral and written histories and in the *gaurav gatha*s of Dalit castes.

Copyright © 2006. SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

THE PASI COMMUNITY

A prominent and widespread community of North India, the Pasis are an important Dalit caste in UP. They have been notified as an SC in the states of Bihar, Haryana, Orissa, Punjab, UP, West Bengal, Himachal Pradesh, the Union Territories of Delhi and Chandigarh and in some parts of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and as far as south Mysore as per the statutory order of 1956. The Pasis of UP live mostly in the central region of Indian, that is, the Lucknow, Allahabad and Faizabad commissionaries. In fact, they reside in 305 Pasi-dominated subdivisions. The significant Pasi communities are: the Bahelias and the Bheels of Badaun; the Aherias and the Bheels of Moradabad; the Parasuraamees of Fatehpur and Allahabad; the Borias of Fatehpur; the Revas of Banda; the Bachhellias and the Bhars of Mirzapur; the Manvas and the Tramaalees of Ghazipur; the Chaurasis of Basti, Sultanpur and Barabanki; the Bhadaurias of Tarai; the Baanias of Lucknow; the Borias, the Mahatias and the Parasmanis of Unnao; the Borias of Rae Bareli; the Behar Dhanuks and the Khatiks of Sitapur; the Baanias of Gonda; the Chunaarh Dhanuks and the Khatiks of Baharaich and the Gujar Pasis of Lucknow and Faizabad. All of them claim to be descendents of the same source (Census of India 1971).

There are two different interpretations of the term Pasi. Crooke (1996) has recorded two popular versions regarding the derivation of the name 'Pasi.' Etymologically the term 'pasi' is derived from the Sanskrit word *pashika* which means 'one who uses a noose.' Pasis use the noose for climbing the palm tree for the purpose of toddy tapping. In Hindi too *pass* or *pasa* means noose. That is one version. According to the other version, which has been found to be more popular among the Pasis during field investigation, their name has been derived from the Hindi word *pasina* which means 'sweat.' There are different traditions in different areas in support of the latter version whose central theme is that they were born out of the sweat of Parashuram, the sixth incarnation of Vishnu (Census of India 1971).

Thus, the origin of the Pasi name is derived from different sources. One is associated with their traditional occupation of toddy tapping and the other with the mythological and glorious association with Parashuram. The fact that now the Pasis lay emphasis on the latter version shows that they use mythology to justify their supposed Kshatriya origin, which serves as a tool in social climbing. In fact, this tendency is further manifested in other interpretations that are given to the etymology of

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

their caste name, which shift from mythological to historical events, so as to justify their glorious past. Thus, during field investigations for the present study, a few Pasi elites in Lucknow who were associated with a social reform organization, the Pasi Jagriti Mandal, interpreted the term Pasi to mean a soldier. According to them the name is composed of two Hindi words: *pa*, which means 'grip' and *asi*, which means 'a sword,' implying, thereby, one who possesses a sword in his hand or, in other words, a soldier. They claimed that the Pasis are a martial community and, in the earlier times, they had joined militias and armies as fighters or soldiers in the defence services of the native princes of the country.[5]

As far as their occupation is concerned, in addition to toddy tapping, the Pasis are traditionally associated with a number of miscellaneous occupations. They serve as watchmen, tend pigs and do manual labour in the fields. Rose regards them to be a caste of pig rearers, professional watchmen and toddy makers (Rose 1991: 20). The 1931 Census Report of the Central Provinces and Berar recorded that the traditional occupation of the Pasis was toddy tapping but some of them were also huntsmen (Census of India 1931). The Census Report of the same year, mentions the Pasis of Mayurbhanj (now the State of Orissa), as migrants from Bihar, where they were toddy tappers, earth workers, hunters and bird catchers (ibid.). During the course of time, some Pasis in certain areas also took to a life of crime and the Pasi community came to be notified as a criminal tribe in UP and erstwhile Vindhya Pradesh, now merged with Madhya Pradesh (Ayyangar 1951: 33).

The Pasis are a predominantly rural community but slowly the need for education is growing among them. A strong sense of upward mobility is also visible among them. They do not want to carry their earlier image of pig rearers, which, it is said, has contributed to their being accorded a low social status. Another factor contributing to the discrimination against them is their reputation for criminal propensities. The Pasis seem to be much concerned by the present state of affairs, particularly in view of their glorious past of being landlords and rulers. They want their community to be restored to its respectful place in society. With this motivation, they have been taking measures from time to time to improve their status in society. Accordingly, in many areas they took the decision to give up pig rearing in an attempt at upward social climbing.[6]

The Pasis have also been sanskritizing their ritual order. Some *Panchayat*s have taken some initiative in this process. A few of them took to the teachings of the Baba Jagjivan Das of the Satnami sect. Some of the Pasi elites in Lucknow took the initiative in forming a caste

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

association at the state level, known as the Pasi Jagriti Mandal, whose main activity is to persuade the government and other local agencies to provide adequate assistance for the welfare of its caste, including educational advancement.[7] The Pasi community believes that, in order to become an effective socio-political forum, it is necessary that the community sheds some of its old caste prejudices and forges ties of unity. In order to do this, an organization named after their caste hero Udadevi, called the Virangana Udadevi Smarak Samiti, was formed, which is active as a forum for reflecting the new identity of the Pasi caste. The Pasi caste *Panchayat*, known as *Biradari* in the eastern regions of UP, *Jawari* in the western parts, and *Panchayat* in the central parts of the state, produces a group of caste elites such as *Chhota Raut* or *Chaudhary* and *Bada Raut*, who function as propagators of caste identity.[8]

PASI INVENTION OF HISTORIES

A major project of invention of histories is taking place within the Pasi caste of UP. It has been initiated, talked about, orally transmitted, and written about by the educated and semi-educated sections of the caste, like the activists and the socio-political elite. Also, the growing sense of power sharing, the urge of identity construction and the need for collective and individual self-respect provide the space for the transmission of such invented histories among the middle and lower ranks of the caste. The implementation of the Mandal Commission report and the contests and debates around the reservation policy, along with the rise and growth of *Dalit-Bahujan* politics in UP, have made the Pasis and other backward castes conscious about their share in State power and acquiring self-respect through history and political power. These histories are published in popular booklets, mostly written by intellectuals, activists and leaders of the community who are involved in the political mobilization of Dalits and downtrodden communities. For the most part, these histories percolate from the written to the oral medium through secondary orality.[9] The writers of these booklets claim that these histories have been derived from their surveys and documentations of the old mounds near Pasi settlements, residues of old forts of local kings, collective memories of the old people around these mounds and fortresses, and oral proverbs, stories and folk songs of the Pasi caste. Some of the episodes narrated by the Pasis as their caste histories seem to be derived from the caste history of the Rajbhar caste. However, many episodes, interpretations and inventions are new

Copyright © 2006. SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

and by-products of the recent identity consciousness of the Pasis as a Dalit caste in northern India.

The Pasi community believes in its golden age past. It emphasizes that the Pasi community had, at one time, ruled over a large area of Avadh. Centuries of Pasi history lies buried beneath mounds, ancient settlements and deserted places that were once densely populated. The Pasis, like other Dalit communities, have a strong sense of being neglected in the writing of the history of the nation. R.K.Choudhury, an eminent Pasi leader and minister in the Mayawati-led government, writes:

> Historians have not written books on the Pasi empire. Scholars have never identified the history of this chivalrous community for their research. Neither did the government departments, established for the purpose of protecting cultural heritage, ever attempt to collect information about the Pasi empire. Not a single book is available in libraries in which details about the Pasi empire are even mentioned. (Choudhury 1997: 3)

Some educated Pasis outlined that the British authors have mentioned Pasi rulers in different gazetteers and other books, but Indian writers almost completely eliminated those chapters from history.[10]

This sense of deprivation from history led the Pasis to invent their own histories. As the assertion for a new identity acquired momentum with the rise of Bahujan (Dalit) politics in UP, this feeling of negligence was sharpened. History appears to act as a very important constituent to their identity construction. After 1980, one found incarnations of many Pasi rulers, heroes and histories. It is not mere coincidence that it was in this time frame that the concept of the Pasi empire was emphasized strongly by Dalit intellectuals and leaders. Mayawati wrote:

> Among the Pasi rulers, the names of Maharaja Bijlee Pasi, Maharaja Satan Pasi, Maharaja Lakhan Pasi, Maharaja Suhaldeo, Maharaja Chheta Pasi and Maharaja Daldeo deserve to be mentioned in golden letters. But unfortunately, the history of these chivalrous and majestic kings has received only negligible treatment in a few books.[11]

Avadhesh Prasad, a leader of the Pasi community, and a former minister in the Mulayam Singh Yadav-led government, expressed the negative impact of the marginalization of this community in history. Without history and literature, communities cannot succeed in joining the mainstream of society nor can they find a respectable place in it. Since literature

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

opens the way for the future, a community without literature closes the door for its future generations. Sources of vision and contemplation are absent without literature (Prasad 1997). This feeling, along with the growing urge to construct an assertive identity and the sense of being deprived of history, led the Pasi community towards the invention of heroes, histories and myths and their documentation in the print medium.

It is interesting to know that despite being divided into various political parties, the intellectuals and leaders active in the construction of Pasi caste identity used the same methods of invention, use and reuse of history. In their lectures, writings and stories, one finds similar content, with a little difference in the narratives to suit their politics. The Pasi intellectuals involved with BJP politics highlight the marginalization of Pasis in the national history due to the false secular academic history writing. On the other hand, Pasi leaders aligned with the BSP and the SP, blame the forward castes for the social, economic and intellectual marginalization of their community.

The idea that myth and history are important makers of identity is not new. The shaping and reshaping of accounts of the past, with changing time, space and context, is a continuous process. In 1939, the Pasis started to form caste associations to consolidate all the Pasis together under one umbrella through their caste history and arouse the collective caste pride of all the Pasis. In this discourse around caste associations, invention of myth and history were the basic constituents. The main traits of this invention were search and research of Sanskritized Brahaminical myths. The Pasi attempt to link themselves with Rishi Parashuram is an outcome of their efforts to Sanskritize themselves and acquire upward mobility in the rigid Brahminical caste system.

THE MAKING OF UDADEVI

The story of Udadevi and the Revolt of 1857 has been narrated as follows:

> There was a peepal tree, heavy and thick, at the centre of Sikanderbagh in Lucknow. Under it were kept earthen vessels, many filled with cold water. When the bloodshed in the battle stopped, many soldiers went there to rest, quench their thirst and enjoy the cool shades of the tree. Under this tree, many British soldiers, belonging to the 53rd and 59th regiment of the British army, were found lying dead. But Dawson (Captain of the British army troop) noted that from the wounds of the soldiers, it was evident that the bullets that hit and killed them had been fired from above. Captain Dawson soon came out of the shade of the tree and called Wallace so as to confirm whether there was someone on the

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

tree. He said that the death of the British soldiers in the battlefield did not occur on account of attacks by bullets from the opposite direction, but by bullets fired from above the tree. Wallace had with him his loaded gun. Cautiously moving backwards, he started searching for the person on the tree. Immediately, he called out to Captain Dawson, saying that he had seen a person and, lifting his gun, he said that he would fulfill his promise before God. Thereafter, he fired at the target and the body of a person fell on the ground. This person was wearing a red coloured jacket and a tight trouser of rose colour. When the person fell on the ground and the jacket was removed, it was discovered that the person was not male but female. She had two pistols of an old model. Of these, one pistol was full of cartridges and other was exhausted. She had in her pocket live cartridges, which had been manufactured very cautiously. When Wallace saw that the dead body was not of male but female, he started weeping, saying, 'Had I known that she was a woman I would have died thousand times but never harmed her.' This lady was none other than Udadevi.

This story is being narrated by the Pasis who believe that this incident took place on 16 November 1857.[12]

The Pasis of the region believe that Begum Hazrat Mahal, in the struggle for freedom, organized an army of women soldiers after her husband's arrest. According to popular belief, the commander of this army was Udadevi. She belonged to Ujrion village near Lucknow. Her husband Makka Pasi was also a soldier in the army of Hazrat Mahal. He laid down his life while fighting the British at Chinhat. In this battle, Begum Hazrat Mahal herself participated, accompanied by Udadevi. It is said that the Begum herself looked after the wounded soldiers and covered shrouds on the bodies of the martyrs. Udadevi suddenly shuddered on seeing dead body of her husband, Makka Pasi, and wept bitterly. It was then that Udadevi vowed to avenge the killing of her husband, and this resulted in the killing of 36 British soldiers from the top of a tree and her subsequent martyrdom (Dinkar 1990: 35). The East India Company had made General Campbell the commander and sent him to Avadh. He was the same Campbell who, on his way to Lucknow from Kanpur, was defeated thrice by the Pasis of Amethi-Banthara. In the fourth attempt, when Campbell was successful in proceeding forward, he first converted the fort of Maharaja Bijlee Pasi into a military cantonment. On 10 November 1857, Campbell reached Dilkusha from the fort of Bijlee Pasi. As per the plan, he was to meet General Outram and Henry Havelock at Moti Mahal in Lucknow. But due to their fear of facing brave Indians, he changed his route. It was on this new route that his forces encountered Udadevi and her troop of women soldiers (ibid.).

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

This story about the role of the martyr, Udadevi Pasi, in the revolt of 1857 finds no mention in the stories collected by colonial ethnographers but seems to have been developed later. The 1971 Census records mention that, according to the Pasi respondents, a Pasi *paltan* (a platoon) rescued Begum Hazrat Mahal from being arrested by the British duing the 1857 Revolt (Census of India 1971: 2). From 1980 onwards, the story of Udadevi began to emerge out of the story of Begum Hazrat Mahal. After 1990, with the formation of the Virangana Udadevi Smarak Sansthan, this story found organizational support for its transmission and celebration. It is narrated in the Lucknow region of central UP, which is still, demographically, Pasi dominant. From these narratives has also emerged the iconography of Udadevi. Since she was linked with a Muslim woman—Begum Hazrat Mahal—she is described as wearing a long skirt and a head cloth and holding a pistol in her hands. Motivated by the same tale, the statue shows her wearing a short-sleeved blouse (as opposed to the attire of an upper-caste Hindu woman) and is projected as an average Pasi woman (Figure 6.1).

After 1990, the UP Government made an attempt to remember the 1857 Revolt at Lucknow and a committee named Swatantrata Sangram Smarak

Figure 6.1
A statue of Udadevi at Sikanderbagh, Lucknow

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

Samiti was formed. The Mayor of Lucknow was elected as its president. Under the supervision of this *Smarak Samiti*, the statue of an unknown *virangana* of 1857 was unveiled in Sikanderbagh. Around 1995, prominent members of the Pasi caste, political leaders and other renowned personalities formed a committee named Virangana Udadevi Smarak Samiti. The same statue was unveiled by Ram Vilas Paswan but this time the statue which had previously been anonymous had the name 'Udadevi Pasi' written on it. The statue was inaugurated for the third time by Kalyan Singh, who was the chief minister of UP at the time, and its new identification became 'Udadevi'. Now every year, 16 November is observed as Udadevi Martyrdom Day for which a conference is organized of people belonging to the Pasi caste, a souvenir is published and Pasi *Ekta* (unity) rallies are organized as a token of remembrance of *virangana* Udadevi.

Observing the Pasi phenomenon of inventing and constructing their own histories, the joint secretary of the Virangana Udadevi Smarak Samiti, Jagjivan Prasad, wrote that whether a child or an old man, a farmer or a worker, a subordinate, an officer or a businessman, every member of the Pasi caste was eager to regain his or her lost pride. Even the *kazi*s, *mullah*s, *pandit*s, politicians and leaders talk about the pride of the Pasis. All of them recall the forgotten history of the Pasi caste by either publishing their history or distributing it. Some launch a cassette or make a film. Some compose an *alha*, *geet* or a *birha* (different kinds of folk songs) or write or direct plays. Some install statues of Pasi kings or Pasi *viranganas*, while others get involved in the beautification or governmentalization of the forts of Pasi kings (Prasad 1997: 18–19). Prasad further mentioned the issuance of a stamp on Bijli Pasi by the Department of Post and Telegraph and the local MLA, Sri Kamla Prasad Rawat's donation of his official residence in Lucknow for the establishment of the office of Virangana Udadevi Memorial Institute. Pasi people believe that not only their caste people but all people would feel grateful for such good deeds done in the welfare of society (ibid.).

The myth of Udadevi has become popular among the people through the erection of her statues and the construction, reconstruction and dissemination of history and stories about her. Various poems have also been composed describing her historic contribution to the Indian freedom movement. One such poem by Rawat (1997) is as follows:

Desh ki Khatir Udha Devi Ladi thi Ladai
Saikaron Angrezon ko Udha Din Girai
Seenen pe Goli Khayee, Nahi Haar Manee
Rahe Doodh ka Doodh Paanee ka Panee

Copyright © 2006. SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

(Translated)

(Uda Devi fought for the country
Uda Devi killed hundreds of Britishers
Faced the bullets but accepted not defeat
What could not happen was injustice
This is pure milk Unadulterated)

The form and narrative plots constructed about Udadevi are similar to the nationalist stories created by nationalist historians such as Vir Savarkar and Pt. Sunder Lal. The rhetorical devices such as metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche or irony in both the narratives are used in a similar fashion. The pattern of description of chivalrous women freedom fighters of the 1857 Revolt was set by Savarkar (1909) in his book *The Indian War of Independence*. He compared Rani Laxmibai to the Goddess Durga, the destroyer of enemies and used various rhetorical devices such as dramatic dialogue, sense of exclamation and so on in his construction of the story. In 1946, Jawaharlal Nehru, in his famous book *The Discovery of India*, picked up similar narrative plots but with certain rationalizations. In his brief description of the appearance of Laxmibai he says:

> One name stands out above others and is revered still in popular memory, the name of Jhansi Ki Rani, a girl of twenty years of age, who died fighting. 'Best and bravest of the rebel leaders,' she was called by the English General who opposed her. (Nehru 1946)

S.C. Sarkar, an eminent historian, also uses similar narrative techniques to bring out the chivalrous image of Rani Laxmibai: 'In a battle (17 June 1858) the queen died fighting with bravery, dressed as a male. Sir Hume took her to be the brightest and bravest army leader' (Sarkar 1951).

The above mentioned narrative forms, rhetorical devices and story-telling filtered down to the Dalit writers too, who were in search of an alternative history to the mainstream nationalist history. In 1997, Sushila Saroj, a Dalit activist and ideologue, in a Hindi essay, used a similar narrative pattern and rhetorical device about Udadevi (Saroj 1997: 7).

The narrative plots that emerge are follows:

(*i*) They depict the existence of the bravery of a male in a female.
(*ii*) They reveal the acceptance of defeat amidst victory by the British commander.

Copyright © 2006, SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250

(*iii*) They introduce the character of the heroine in a dramatic style.
(*iv*) They lay more emphasis on story telling than attempting to present academic research.
(*v*) Apart from narrating the bravery of the person in the struggle, they are also a tribute to the slain for their sacrifice to the nation.

In both groups of narratives, that is, the nationalist and the Dalit, one cannot find much difference in the form of the presentation of the event. Both use storytelling techniques, rhetorical devices and create a hierarchical arrangement between various historical groups, although the location of the storyteller, the historian and the way of emplotting the events in the story may be different.

Power of the Past

Like any other construction of myths, the construction of the myth of Udadevi was aimed at identity formation and dissent. Thus it cannot be said to be a pure and simple invention of history. The inventions of stories based on historical events, have social and political causes behind such inventions, which make them alive and effective in terms of mobilizing people who identify themselves with the concerned stories. The myth of Udadevi is also being used for the political mobilization of the Pasi community and this act of myth creation makes it relevant in terms of identity formation, memory and caste history.

On 13 March 1997, the Virangana Udadevi Smarak Sansathan, an organization involved in mobilizing the Pasi community on socio-political issues, organized two big rallies in Hasanpur and Khetni near Hardoi (Prasad 1997). On 7 February 1997, it held a big Pasi conference in Haidar Garh, presided over by the BSP leader, Sri R.K. Chaudhury. In this conference, white sarees (*dhoti*s) were distributed among the widows, and those students who had excelled in their high school examination were awarded (ibid.). On Udadevi Memorial Day (15 June), the same year, a big Pasi *sammelan* was organized in Bhiti by the people of the Pasi caste (ibid.). On 28 September 1997, in Arjun Ganj, Lucknow, people of the Pasi caste celebrated Udadevi Gaurav Diwas. It was here that the flag of the Pasi caste, rose in colour with the symbol of the sword and spear, was hoisted for the first time (ibid.).

Not only have the elites of the Pasi caste, but various political parties too—the BSP, the SP, the Lokshakti Party and the BJP—have used the

Copyright © 2006. SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 9/27/2014 4:39 AM via JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIV
AN: 283721 ; Badri Narayan.; Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India : Culture, Identity, and Politics
Account: s1147250